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MEMORIES OF
GEORGE MEREDITH, O.M.

GEORGE MEREDITH

Silhouette taken by Sir John Butcher, Bart., K.C., M.P., in 1885.

Frontispiece

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MEMORIES OF GEORGE MEREDITH O.M.

BY

LADY BUTCHER

WITH THREE ILLUSTRATIONS

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1919

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TO

WILL AND MARIE

AND

THEIR CHILDREN

PREFACE

THESE Memories of forty-one years' friendship with George Meredith may, I hope, have some value for those who know and appreciate his novels and poems, and may not be without interest to those who had the privilege of personal acquaintance with him.

They are in no sense offered or intended even as a partial biography. They are compiled partly from recollections, and partly from notes made in my diaries.

These notes contain a contemporaneous record of his sayings, and as such have, I hope, a certain value. I have therefore thought it best to give them in their original form, necessarily rough and fragmentary, rather than detract from their character by any attempt to polish or improve them.

It is beyond my powers by any written record adequately to reproduce his illuminating talk, or to describe his clear perceptive mind, or his wise counsels in times of anxiety. From what I have written the reader will, I trust, be able to outline for himself a true picture of the character of my friend as I knew him.

It is a matter of regret to me that I have been unable altogether to avoid referring to my own life and experiences; but it seemed impossible otherwise to make the purpose and meaning of his sayings and counsels rightly understood.

A. M. B.

1919.

CHAPTER I

THE first time I ever saw Mr. George Meredith was in 1867, before dawn on a morning of June, and the manner of it was this.

I was an only child of thirteen years of age, and was taken by my parents to stay with our relatives, Dr. and Mrs. Gordon at Pixholme, under Box Hill. My cousin, Jim Gordon, an Eton boy of sixteen, suggested to me that we should get up early in the morning, unknown to our parents, and walk up Box Hill to see the sun rise. This seemed to me to promise a joyful escapade, and I gladly agreed, hardly sleeping all night for excitement.

We started long before it was light, and as we groped our way along the Leatherhead road, Jim Gordon said to me :

'I know a madman who lives on Box Hill. He 's quite mad, but very amusing, he likes walks and sunrises. Let 's go and shout him up!' So we trudged up the little drive to Flint Cottage, Mr. Meredith's home (the chalet was not built then), and began to throw small stones at the window of his bedroom.

It was quickly thrown up, and a loud and cheerful voice asked 'what we meant by trying to break his window.' We explained that we wanted him to climb up Box Hill with us and see the sun rise. In a miraculously short time Mr. Meredith joined us, slightly clad, his nightshirt thrust into brown trousers, and his bare feet into leather slippers, no hat on his head, twisting his stick, and summoning his brown retriever dog. He started to walk very fast up the steep grass incline of Box Hill, very easy for him to climb in those vigorous days, and for my country-bred cousin, but pantingly difficult to my town-bred lungs and muscles.

'Come on, London-pated girl,' he shouted, and up I struggled to sink exhausted on the top, and then we sat and watched the sun rise and glorify the valley and the hills. I smile to remember that then I insisted on reading aloud to Mr. Meredith one of the hymns from Keble's *Christian Year*, while he gravely listened to the birds singing around us.

I shall never forget his conversation that morning. If we had over-strained the powers of our body climbing so fast up the hill, he certainly strained the powers of our minds as he poured forth the most wonderful prose hymn to Nature, Life, and what he called *obligation*, by which I understood he meant Duty.

His enthusiasm, his personality, so one with Nature, the summer and the morning, startled and bewildered me, and for the first time in my spoilt only-child life I was awake and interested in something outside myself.

I was very weary in mind and body when I returned home, but I knew that I

had watched the sun rise beside a Poet and a Thinker; and thus began for me a friendship that never diminished during the forty-one years that it lasted.

During the days that followed we made several more excursions and picnics with Mr. Meredith.

One early morning visit to Betchworth Beeches remains specially in my memory, for he loved the beech trees, trunk, branch, and leaves,—the pale yellow leaves that they wear in early spring, that are described as 'Primrose Mountains' in his poem 'Love in a Valley.'

These Nature talks were a great marvel to us children, Jim and Eva Gordon and myself. Mr. Meredith used to advise us to go to our Mother Nature and learn of her, and not to look upon trees, mountains, fields and lakes as merely the background of our own little ephemeral lives. He told us that he had trained himself when he walked 'to observe, not to feel.'

I remember well his laughter at the little London girl, who, hearing a bird

sing in a bush, and eager to show ' observation,' asked if that was not a nightingale ? As it was not yet morning, and the light was dim, it seemed quite probable that it was a nightingale ! But there followed a hail of ridicule about my ears, and jests at the ' flighty girl ' who didn't distinguish between the note of an English thrush and the song of the ' foreign singer,' as he used to call the nightingale.

In those days his laughter, rhymes, and jokes were constant, but he was ever a master of exquisite chaff, and his words never really hurt. They only stimulated us to try and find a retort. Though we did not often succeed, the effort was very good for our brains.

Whenever I needed a rest and change from the rather over-strenuous educational life that my parents organised for me in London, I was always sent down to stay with Dr. and Mrs. Gordon at Pixholme.

The Dorking Valley was real country in those days. There was only one little

station at Box Hill, reached by train from Charing Cross. The Victoria line was not built, there were far fewer houses and villas along the road, and it was possible to walk or ride for miles without meeting an excursionist.

During these visits I constantly saw Mr. Meredith. Flint Cottage was barely half a mile from Pixholme, and he came over very often to lunch, tea, and dinner, and to sit in the pleasant garden under the giant tulip tree.

He had many interests in common with old Dr. Gordon, who in his youth lived in Weimar for a time, had known Goethe personally, and had also served in the Austrian army. Moreover, he was a very good linguist, and was well read in the European literature of his day.

One afternoon, while we were having tea on the lawn, Mr. Meredith suddenly said to a girl visitor: 'When you were in London, your face was like a sheet of white paper; and *now* it looks as if I had written a sonnet upon it!'

Various scientific and literary men and foreigners used to come and stay at Pixholme. Dr. Gordon always invited Mr. Meredith to meet them. On these occasions both he and his guests were anxious to get to 'real talk' instead of the local gossip of the countryside, but the ladies themselves enjoyed hearing Mr. Meredith talk, and sometimes lingered over their dessert to hear his witty remarks. On one such occasion we children, who were waiting outside the dining-room door in the hall, heard him say to the gentlemen, as the ladies left the room:

'Long live the decent separation of the sexes!'

I do not think Mr. Meredith liked the company of very rich people, and I remember well as a child how puzzled I was, and what a new idea it appeared to me, when I heard him say that in many cases the vision of rich people was limited to their personal possessions, and that their mental horizon was bounded by their own park gates. Such ideas are truisms

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nowadays. In the sixties they appeared startling and revolutionary!

He was by nature very proud, and haughtily resented anything like patronage. He had a certain carriage of the head that we grew to recognise whenever he suspected any one of attempting to patronise him. They did not do it a second time.

With his Surrey neighbours who were his personal friends, however rich they were, he was very genial, and chaffed them constantly about their French cooks, orchid houses, and well-filled stables, and would ask them when they returned to their country residences from their town mansions, 'Well, have you been going to many gabble gobble dinner parties?'

One day there was a garden fête at a house in the Dorking Valley, and a careless footman spilt a plate of strawberries and cream all over Mrs. M.'s new Paris gown.

The lady laughed away sympathy, and said there were plenty more dresses to be had where that one had come from, but

Mr. Meredith whispered to Mrs. Gordon: 'My dear! I can hear her give a fifty guinea sigh!'

The Gordons and I were very fond of play-acting, and we invented a sort of game in which half the company would try and portray some abstract quality such as Fear, Courage, Ambition, Conceit, Love, Hypocrisy, and so on, either as a form of charade or in dumb crambo. The other half of the party (which generally consisted of our elders) were expected to guess what it was that we were trying to depict.

Mr. Meredith was amused with these games, and while his wife helped with the dressing-up and properties, he would contribute many suggestions and criticisms, but he never could be persuaded to act himself, preferring always to be a member of the audience, who observed and criticised.

On the other hand, he would often out in the garden, or while we were walking over the hills, start a kind of comic dialogue

in which he himself would represent both actors, and these stories and episodes would make the longest uphill road seem short to us.

He would, for instance, start a romantic story, and invent love-affairs and adventures for us, or for some of the visitors who were staying at Pixholme, and the comedy of these stories generally consisted of the individual selected to be the hero or heroine of these adventures being, apparently, peculiarly unsuitable to the rôle.

I recall to mind one little gentleman, very plain, short, and bald, with a hesitating manner. Mr. Meredith, as soon as ever he met him, started him on a series of gay and gallant adventures in the pursuit of a fair heiress who lived on one of the hills round Dorking. I am not sure that the man and the lady had ever met, but that did not hinder Mr. Meredith's inventions in the least, and he launched his little hero on one adventure after another, and every time he came to Pixholme Mr. Meredith

would be ready with a new and fantastic suggestion as to the manner in which he should propose marriage to the lady, or some novel idea as to the way in which he might capture her affection. Mrs. Meredith entered into the fun with her husband, and speculated upon her side as to what the damsel would answer to all these amorous declarations of devotion.

I wondered sometimes how the poor man could endure these constant caricatures of his hesitation and peculiarities, and thought that his sense of humour must have been abnormally developed for him to appreciate such constant laughter against himself; till Mr. Meredith suggested to me that he was really subtly flattered at being supposed to be capable of inspiring devotion in such an attractive lady at all!

One afternoon I went for a walk up Box Hill with Mrs. Meredith, to look for wild flowers, and the next morning Mr. Meredith came over to Pixholme almost breathless with joy to announce the safe arrival of

his daughter, his ' dearie girl.' There was great rejoicing and health drinking upon this great event; Jim Gordon, to honour the occasion to the best of his power, called the new foal ' the dearie girl.'

Eva Gordon was invited to be godmother to the child, and she and I often walked over to Flint Cottage to admire the baby, and to play with her brother, William Maxse, then a little boy of five years old.

Mrs. Meredith spoke English with a pretty French accent. She was by birth a Madlle. Vulliamy, a family of French Huguenot origin, and had spent many of her younger years in Normandy, where her brothers owned and managed some large wool mills. She translated various French books and papers for her husband's publishers, including the *Life of Cavour*. She played the piano very well; she was a brilliant performer of Chopin, and played classical music of all sorts accurately and with understanding. Her husband obviously enjoyed her music,

and the pleasure that she was able to give to his friends. I used to walk over to play duets with her, which was a great enjoyment, but unfortunately Mr. Meredith did not like either duets or practisings, and he used to make sarcastic comments on our performances, and excelled himself in weird and whimsical comparisons of our music to farmyard noises.

After this summer Mr. and Mrs. Meredith came very constantly to stay with my parents in London, the dear 'Elvastons,' as they called them, because they lived in Elvaston Place. Mr. Meredith was specially fond of my mother, who, having a great sense of fun herself, much appreciated his conversation, although she told him often that she detested poetry and couldn't read or understand his novels.

From my Diary

Mother said to Mr. Meredith that 'Girls are always putting their foot into things.' He replied, 'And the pity is that they often leave it there.' I suppose he meant that they do not

recover happiness after foolishly losing their hearts.

Talking of the flirtations of some girls that we knew, Mr. Meredith said to Mother, 'You cannot call such things *Love*. There is no real passion in such things. "I like Harry, I can't endure Charley, but Tom 's the man for me!" and then —the dear girl fancies that she *loves* Tom!' He then said, 'That it was very easy for a man to win half a woman's heart. The difficulty was to win her whole heart, and the misery of many marriages came, because a woman often gave her hand, when only half her heart was won.'

Later he said to me: 'Make up your mind, did you say? Make up your *mind*? You haven't got one yet. You are all round the clock in twenty-four hours!'

From my Diary

Mother was ill, so Father let me dine downstairs. I sat between Mr. Fitz-James Stephen[1] and Mr. George Meredith, and Mr. Fitz-James Stephen said, 'I have been reading Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and I think it is the most foolish poem that ever was written.' (Expostulations.) 'No, I 'm not denying that there are a few nice things about the devil—but all the same I do think it is the most foolish poem that ever was

[1] Afterwards Mr. Justice FitzJames Stephen.

written.' Afterwards he and Mr. Meredith were very rude to each other about bottle-nosed whales.

I must often have bored Mr. Meredith with my crude appreciation of the 'obvious' in poetry and literature, but I never once remember his belittling of the many religious writers that I so enthusiastically admired. He would listen or not as the mood took him, and sometimes he would talk himself, and warn me against what he called 'predatory pleasures,' or allowing happiness to come into one's life at the expense of others; also he not seldom pointed out the blessings of 'celestial thwacks' to the soul of girl as well as boy, and how the life of 'drifting ease' ruins the character and the brains, and how little value to the world were the opinions of the 'guarded ones.'

The Gordon family had a somewhat exasperating habit of quoting their favourite authors, in season and out of season, and naturally any one staying with them rapidly acquired the same trick.

Mr. Meredith made war upon this habit, and his method of combat was to start apocryphal quotations from invented authors and poets and essayists, extraordinarily comic to listen to. One day I repeated to him a favourite quotation of mine, and he answered with a grimace: 'Yes, my dear, when the candle burns down it does *so* waste the grease.'

From my Diary

When he was staying with us in London one of Miss Charlotte Yonge's novels was lying on the table, and Mr. Meredith picked it up, and as he often does with my books, read a few sentences, and then continued to read on out of his own head a sustained conversation between the characters, calling out: 'This woman does contrive dialogue well!' I was glad he said this, as I do like Miss Charlotte Yonge's books. He went on to talk and point out his difficulties of making conversation in books natural, and the banal 'she said' and 'he said,' and so on. Mother says she wishes Mr. Meredith would copy Miss Yonge's method of telling a tale so that it can be understood, in his own books.

Mr. Meredith was very much at home at

Elvaston Place, and jested freely with my mother and myself, but in all his intercourse with us there was always a certain formality that appealed to me. However much he laughed at me when we were alone or with my mother, he always called me ' Miss Brandreth ' in public, and I liked this, being very young.

In the sixties and seventies South Kensington was something of an Anglo-Indian village, and I used to be dreadfully bored listening to the old Indian reminiscences of bygone experiences. In those days young ladies were expected to listen to their elders, it was polite to look interested, and unpardonable to fidget and interrupt, but Mr. Meredith's conversation was a very welcome change, and often made that of other people seem dull.

CHAPTER II

MR. MEREDITH AND SHAKESPEARE READINGS

We used to get up Shakespeare Readings, and our parents encouraged this pastime as a good educational exercise.

It is rather amusing to remember that my first experience of a Shakespeare Reading was at a Girls' School, where my father sent me to attend a series of lectures upon Shakespeare's plays given there by Dr. F. G. Furnivall. The day after each lecture the pupils read the play, each taking a separate part, and the first time I was given the small part of Gratiano in the *Merchant of Venice* to recite in the Trial Scene. I was carried away, and said: 'Oh! be thou *damned*, inexorable Jew!' with such fervour that Dr. Furnivall was convinced at once that I had the makings

of a great actress, and being very young, and only too credulous of praise, I was quite prepared to believe him, and was fired with the ambition to act. My mother promptly refused even to let me take part in any private theatricals, but after much persuasion consented to allow my father and me to get up a Shakespeare Reading, but she sternly refused to let us have anything but a *Reading*. She would not allow me to dress up, or have any scenery, and, moreover, she absolutely declined to let me read any part with a young man as my lover. To her old-fashioned mind this was not seemly. However, she consented to Mr. Meredith's taking these lovers' parts, as she said 'he was always so good for Allie, as he understands girls so well.'

There were some tears shed about the prohibition of all 'dress-up,' about which Mr. Meredith made endless jokes, but to make up for our disappointment he wholeheartedly threw himself into the rehearsals and preparations, and used to coach us

all carefully in the proper speaking of the parts and in the careful study of the various characters that we read.

He used to come and stay with us at Elvaston Place for these Shakespeare Readings, and the rehearsals would take place at Pixholme or in London before the evening arranged for the representation.

All the parts were studied and prepared beforehand, and were more or less acted by the performers, while delightful incidental music was played and improvised by Mr. Edward Dannreuther. Mr. Meredith was an admirable coach. His comments and sarcastic imitations of our efforts were very amusing, and, though he was always laughing at us, everybody enjoyed his criticisms; they were pure fun, and nothing unkind was ever said. Most of the readers were very young, and we used in our ignorance gaily to prance through the most awful passages; then Mr. Meredith would, without a smile, just take the book, pencil out the objec-

tionable passages in the text, and say: '*Don't read that*!'

Much ado about Nothing was the first play we attempted, in which I read the part of Beatrice, and Mr. Meredith that of Benedick, and he took endless pains to make me study that part carefully.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

32 Elvaston Place,

Tuesday, Queen's Gate, W. *Jan.* 11*th.*

Don Pedro . .	Hon. Dudley Campbell.
Don John . .	Mr. Dalrymple.
Claudio . .	Mr. Arthur Milman.
Benedick . .	Mr. George Meredith.
Leonato . .	Prof. A. J. Ellis.
Antonio . .	Mr. E. L. Brandreth.
Balthazar . .	Prof. Sylvester.
Borachio . .	Dr. Burney Yeo.
Conrade . .	Dr. F. J. Furnivall.
A Sexton . .	Mr. Dannreuther.
Dogberry . .	Mr. Cunynghame.
Verges . .	Hon. H. A. Lawrence.
Friar Francis .	Rev. Henry Milman.
Hero . . .	Mrs. O'Malley.
Beatrice . .	Miss Alice Brandreth.
Margaret . .	Mrs. William Spottiswoode.
Ursula . . .	Miss Lawrence.
Populace, soldiers, and Guards .	Mr. J. E. H. Gordon.

Later we read the *Taming of the Shrew*, which was sheer rollicking fun on Mr. Meredith's part. He thoroughly enjoyed reading Petruchio to my Katharine. We ended up that Shakespeare Reading with a dance, and at the supper afterwards he made the most amusing speech.

While we were rehearsing the *Taming of the Shrew*, Mr. Meredith said that I was trying to be too tragic, and must be more petulant. At last, as I could not get the tone that he wanted, he seized a bedroom candlestick, held it out, and exclaimed: 'In my own papa's house I always had the best wax candles, and now you give me only these horrid dips.'

In these side ways he often gave us all valuable help, but was unsparing in his criticism and caricatures of our reading.

As You Like It was a more serious performance, and was most carefully studied. Rosalind was a favourite Shakespearean heroine with Mr. Meredith, and he took great pains to teach me, without I fear very satisfactory results. He himself, as

Orlando, did not have much scope. Here is a letter that I have preserved, sent by Mr. Meredith in answer to my request that he would come up to town and join us in preparing a reading of *As You Like It.*

Wife being absent, I could find
Nought to say to Rosalind.
She returns and swift as wind
Now I write to Rosalind.

Young Orlando, reared as hind,
Was fit mate for Rosalind.
(When his manners were refined)
He had youth like Rosalind.

Shall a man in grey declined,
Seem the same for Rosalind ?
Yea, though merely aged in rind,
Is he worthy, Rosalind ?
This in grave debate should bind
Parliaments and Rosalind.

Still if captious, wayward, blind,
And the rest of 't, Rosalind
Should insist—if to her mind,
If she have one, Rosalind
Thinks me (if to thought inclined
Ever) I with Rosalind,
And I say it having dined,
Slept and dreamt of Rosalind.

I will do my best, and kind
Prove our audience, Rosalind !
Take these words for treaty signed,
—No Orlando, Rosalind,
But a man with wrinkles lined
Vows to read with Rosalind ! '

Professor Sylvester, the mathematician, who joined in the Shakespeare Readings of *As You Like It*, printed three hundred odd lines to rhyme with Rosalind. He sent a copy to Mr. Meredith, who then wrote this note to my mother.

DEAR MRS. BRANDRETH,—After three nights of anxious thought !—and it may be communicated to the Professor—if you think fit.

' Now so richly *Sylvestrined*
Here 's the last word to Rosalind.'

And my compliments to her from yours most faithful, GEORGE MEREDITH.

DEAR MRS. BRANDRETH,—I shall be very happy to come on Thursday the 27th. . . . Please to tell my dear Beatrice Rosalind Katharine that I bear in mind the scheme of writing a play for her. . . . I beg to be remembered to Mr. Brandreth and Katharine, and I am ever your most faithful and devoted

GEORGE MEREDITH.

After *As You Like It*, at Mr. Meredith's suggestion we undertook *Twelfth Night*. Mr. Meredith was cast for Malvolio and I for Maria. He gave me several hours of careful instruction in his idea of the part. Meanwhile I, with the help of my cousins, was studying to imitate, not Shakespeare's Malvolio, but the peculiar idiosyncrasies of Mr. Meredith himself—such as tossing his head, shooting his linen cuffs, and so on. When the day came, and a goodly party were gathered together to listen to our reading of the play, I shall never forget Mr. Meredith's face when he quickly realised what I was trying to do. I am afraid that the performance was not so much of a success as it should have been, owing to my own and the other actors' and actresses' laughter, but I think Mr. Meredith enjoyed the fun, and for months afterwards alluded to it constantly.

He had laughed and mocked so much, and so often, at all our little peculiarities of gesture and diction, that he forgave us for trying to do the same with him, and

enjoyed it all as a joke against himself. But I don't think Mrs. Meredith quite approved, though she had been let into the secret beforehand.

Our last performance was more ambitious. We had a printed programme for the *Merchant of Venice*—for which the music was improvised by Mr. Dannreuther.

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

The Duke of Venice		Mr. KEGAN PAUL.
Prince of Morocco	*Suitors to Portia*	Mr. DALRYMPLE.
Prince of Arragon		Mr. F. HOLLAND.
Antonio (*a Merchant of Venice*)		Mr. A. J. ELLIS.
Bassanio (*his kinsman, suitor likewise to Portia*)		Mr. GEORGE MEREDITH
Salanio	*Friends to Antonio and Bassanio*	Hon. H. A. LAWRENCE.
Salarino		Dr. BURNEY YEO.
Gratiano		Mr. J. STANSFIELD.
Salerio		Hon. DUDLEY CAMPBELL.
Lorenzo (*in love with Jessica*)		Mr. GARDINER.
Shylock (*a rich Jew*)		Mr. PALGRAVE SIMPSON
Tubal (*a Jew, his friend*)		Mr. CHENERY.
Launcelot Gobbo (*Clown, servant to Shylock*)		Mr. ROGET.

Old Gobbo (*Father to Launcelot*) . .	Mr. MALLET.
Leonardo (*Servant to Bassanio*) . . .	Dr. F. J. FURNIVALL.
Balthazar, Stephano (*Servants to Portia*)	Capt. LOCH. Mr. HUGH SPOTTISWOODE.
Antonio's Servant . .	Mr. R. CUST.
Clerk of the Court . .	Mr. VERRALL.
Portia (*a rich heiress*) .	Miss ALICE BRANDRETH.
Nerissa (*her waiting maid*)	Miss ALBINIA CUST.
Jessica (*daughter to Shylock*)	Miss MARGARET EVANS.

Piano . . Mr. E. DANNREUTHER.

Song . . 'Tell me where is fancy bred.'
Mrs. ARTHUR MILMAN AND Mr. GARDINER.

In order to mark the scene in the Courts of Justice, I was anxious to put on a thin black cloth coat, but my mother was adamant, and when Mr. Meredith argued with her (knowing how much I was set upon obtaining this little concession) she replied: 'If Allie did it *badly*—she might dress up and do anything she liked, but as it is, well, I simply won't hear of it.' Mr. Meredith was obliged to acquiesce, though dryly assuring my mother that my

talents as an actress need give her no anxiety as to the future.

So the performance took place as before, but the evening was memorable chiefly for Mr. Palgrave Simpson's acting of Shylock, and for Dannreuther's exquisite music. But alack! for me it was a weary long time before Mr. Meredith forgot my tears on the subject of 'the waterproof cloak!'

We also read some of the historical plays of Shakespeare, and I vividly remember one evening at the Stephens's house in Cornwall Gardens, when we read *Julius Cæsar*, and Herbert and Jim Stephen recited the principal parts. Jim Stephen's rendering of Mark Antony was a remarkable performance.

Mr. Meredith was a quite admirable coach. He had a beautiful speaking voice himself, and took much pains in teaching the various readers of these plays to manage the tones of their voice properly, and would often point out to us how varied were the possibilities of inflection, and

how much speech gained by placing the voice in different ways according to the emotions that we wished to convey. As I said, he had a resonant and beautiful voice (Eva Gordon used to declare that it would be a treat to hear him recite the Alphabet), but it must be recorded that he was not himself a good reader. His performance was often very disappointing, and he would be so busy observing the other readers that, when his own turn came, he lost his place and muddled his lines, and when he read the lover's part he employed a sort of contemptuous tone that made it exasperatingly difficult for any one reading the heroine's part with him to imagine for a moment that he was even interested in her, or able to admire her at all. His reading of Petruchio gave him fairer scope, and Malvolio was extremely good, the words of which he trolled forth in the gayest, most infectious manner. We all laughed so much that it was difficult to continue our reading.

It must, however, be remembered that

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owing to my mother's dictum against my reading a part in a play with any young unmarried man as my lover, poor Mr. Meredith was forced to undertake parts such as Orlando in *As You Like It*, and Bassanio in the *Merchant of Venice*, which were naturally rather uninteresting to him.

I have kept all the books of the plays we studied together, and from time to time love to recall the great intellectual pleasure it was to read with him, also the very great fun, for no one has ever brought out the jocund drollery of Shakespeare's plays as he used to do.

Here is a letter that I received in answer to one I wrote to him, begging him to discover for us a fine reader for the part of Shylock.

My dear Miss Brandreth,—I know Palgrave Simpson, am very fond of him and believe he will do anything for me, until he knows you, when he will be subject to a new allegiance. If you and I do not clash therefore you may count on him. He is of ripe age, turned 70, and with a consuming passion for the stage, and the dear

heart of him so frankly nourished by flattery that he will open his mouth and shut his eyes, and take it in a ladle—so he will just suit you.

How I dislike men (in the abstract) men of a certain age who pretend to refuse their spoonful, and all the while their honest old lips are dribbling at the corners. If you are moved to do a kindness, have my wife the day before I come—whisk her to music or the play. . . . For my part I don't like to leave my baby gal alone in the house for more than one night. . . .

I beg you to remember me warmly to your father and mother both—and believe me for life—Your devoted servant and *lord,*

GEORGE MEREDITH.

CHAPTER III

In 1872 old Dr. Gordon died, but Mrs. Gordon and her children continued to live at Pixholme, and I went more often than before to stay with them.

We spent long hours riding over the Surrey Hills and Downs, when we constantly met Mr. Meredith striding along with Admiral Maxse or some other favoured companion.

They always gave us cheery greetings and hilarious prophecies as to the disasters awaiting us if we rode so recklessly. Those were long happy weeks of irresponsible enjoyment, and Mr. Meredith's company was a great addition to their gaiety.

In those days he was not a famous author. He was only known to the general British public as a writer of novels very difficult to understand. He was

often confounded with Owen Meredith (Lord Lytton's pseudonym), then much more read and talked about.

There were always some perceptive minds who appreciated his work, but they were not numerous. For myself I can frankly say that, much as I relished his company and conversation, I could not at that time understand his novels or poems. He suffered from being far in advance of his generation, and he would not conform to anything or to anybody.

From my Diary

I notice that Mr. Meredith likes to hear about the people I meet, the books I read, and the classes and lectures I attend, but he never wants to hear my *opinion* about anything or anybody. I asked him why? and he replied, 'Because I know *that* already.' I asked him how it was that he knew so much about girls and women, and he replied 'It is my mother that is in me.'

I used to enjoy hearing his talk about people; his perception and judgment of character was extraordinarily shrewd.

One day he said, speaking of a little lady we knew:

'She is a woman who has never had the first tadpole wriggle of an idea,' but he owned that 'she has a mind as clean and white and flat as plate' (and added thoughtfully), 'there are no eminences in it.'

'The first tadpole wriggle' was a favourite expression of his, when he wished to convey the idea of the first beginnings of thought.

One afternoon we were all discussing which features of a woman's face were most expressive of her character. Some of us thought the mouth, others the eyes, or carriage of the head, but Mr. Meredith averred that the feature above all others that most betrayed a man's or a woman's disposition was the nostrils. He disliked and distrusted any one with tall narrow nostrils; on the other hand, a sensitive wide nostril like a race-horse he professed to admire. We all began to examine each other's noses, and decided that his own

was the only one present that stood the test.

My parents gave a fancy dress ball, and we all did our best to induce Mr. Meredith to join our party, and suggested costumes that we thought would be suitable for him ; but he entirely refused to accept my mother's pressing ' invitation to shake a leg in an antic costume ' ; but he was curious to hear what dresses were being designed for other guests.

One elderly Professor of world-wide reputation pressed my mother to send him an invitation. The week after the ball I heard Mr. Meredith describe the joke of it to a mutual friend.

' The dear old Professor has but three hairs, which float over his venerable shoulders when he attends scientific gatherings, when I am informed he looks massive and dignified, but Mrs. Brandreth gives a fancy dress ball, and lo ! behold ! the three hairs are jauntily brushed up over his bald pate. He trips forth as a cavalier of the time of Charles II. ! His

form—his form, dear! is clad in pale mauve satin, and lace ruffles ! ! ' Mr. Meredith, convulsed with mirth till the tears ran down his cheeks, kept exclaiming between shouts of laughter: ' His form ! Pale mauve satin and lace ruffles ! His form ! '

Both Mr. and Mrs. Meredith enjoyed going to plays and concerts, and they frequently stayed with my parents at Elvaston Place for a night or two, and at breakfast next morning Mr. Meredith would keep us laughing and listening till eleven o'clock, and then we went our various ways with reluctance, for his comments and caricatures of the performers were often a greater treat to us than the plays themselves.

From my Diary

Mr. Meredith went with father and me to see Irving and Mrs. Crowe (*née* Bateman) in *Macbeth*. During supper he explained the acting of the sleep-walking scene to mother, and wishing to describe the way that Lady Macbeth pushed the palms of her hands from nose to ear, he said, ' My dear Mrs. Brandreth, I assure you that she came through her hands like a

corpse stricken with mania in the act of resurrection!'

I sometimes talked with Mr. Meredith as to my idea of a husband, and I used to explain to him that what I wanted specially was a 'good comrade.' Then he would warn me not to think too much of brilliancy and wit, but to realise that, more than all other qualities that a girl needed to find in her mate, was *dependableness*, which would last far longer than the tinsel attractions that he professed to think I admired. He said to my mother that 'it was dangerous for two excitable people to wed for fear their children should leap out of their cradles in their desire to reach the moon.'

In spite of his jokes and sarcasm, I often found myself chatting somewhat unreservedly to him about my small flirtations and friendships, and on this subject I found him a most attentive, comprehending listener, and extraordinarily shrewd in his diagnosis of a man's character, though I must confess that

sometimes he would make very disconcerting remarks.

From my Diary

Mr. Meredith was laughing at me for some of my elderly men friendships. He said, 'My dearie, you are like a soft west wind blowing, and you keep all your tops softly humming. Now Mr. A. is a nice steady old top (in fact he began to hum before she even whipt him), but take care of Mr. B., he 's leaning a little over to the left, while Mr. C. hums gently away without the dear girl taking any trouble about him at all.'

Mr. Meredith used to enjoy going with my father and me to Mr. Dannreuther's concerts in Orme Square. These were particularly pleasurable to him, as, instead of sitting painfully in rows, comfortable chairs were provided, and after an excellent performance of trios and quartettes and other chamber music, we used to meet our friends Browning, George Eliot, and many well-known authors and musicians, and, later, Wagner himself, who was staying with the Dann-

reuthers. If silence reigned during the performance of the music, talk and jests continued often to a late hour afterwards.

Here is a letter written to me by Mr. Meredith, in answer to an invitation to Orme Square:

My dear Miss Brandreth,—I have too much work to be in town to-morrow, and my promise to myself to go to Dannreuther's concert—next time, was but my way of saying how much I liked the last. Otherwise the pleasure of being led there by you would be, as it were, to be prepared by a poet to sit with the Muses. I know you will be in full sympathy with one who chances to have said more than he meant, indeed you should be; for by and by (yes, it must be so) a certain door will have to be broken open, and a room laid bare with many tops in it, the humming of the peg, each with his history of the one who spun him.—Now? so innocently! in my Dannreuther fashion, on that occasion I shall come forward to plead for you. I beg you will convey to your mother my warmest thanks for her invitation.—Your very devoted

George Meredith.

From my Diary

To-day I was foolish enough to say to Mr. Meredith that I did not like Mr. A. at all, he

was stupid and had no conversation. . . . Mr. Meredith pounced on this and said :

'Listen to the girl—*no conversation*! Once I walked down a lane and went into a cemetery, and behold there were all the graves of those who had been rejected by this dear girl—and on each tombstone was a name, and beneath each name was the sad epitaph :

"*Died for want of repartee.*"'

One hot afternoon in the garden at Pixholme, Mr. Meredith told me he had gone to sleep in a lane, and when he woke up he heard three beautiful daughters of a noble house, who were amusing themselves making hay, and as they rested from their toil this was the conversation that he professed to have overheard :

I. 'My lover must be a great soldier and conquer the world with his sword.'

II. 'And mine must be a great thinker and win the hearts of men with his pen.'

III. (And most beautiful of them all.) 'And my lover must be strong enough not to stand my nonsense!'

A good many of our mutual friends suggested both to Mr. Meredith and to me that Cecilia Halkett in *Beauchamp's Career* was taken from myself, as Beauchamp was undoubtedly from Admiral Maxse, and Blackburn Tuckham from Sir William Hardman, and we received several letters and rhymes on the subject. These effusions caused us both much laughter and amusement, and one day I asked him if there was any truth in the suggestion, and he said—as far as I can remember his words—that few authors entirely copy a living character, but that I had been conventionally brought up, and, being the only child of my parents, would doubtless have the same views as Cecilia, and under their influence refuse to marry any one of whom my father and mother did not entirely approve. This idea I violently combated, and assured him that if I cared enough I would marry a man whatever my parents said. He hunched his shoulders and changed the conversation.

Later in life he often told me that

Beauchamp's Career was one of his favourite works, and Renée was the character of all others that he loved best. Mrs. Meredith was greatly chagrined at the tragic ending of the book, and begged and implored him to change it, and there were some arguments between them on this subject, but though he was sad at disappointing his wife's wishes, he never swerved from his intention, constantly affirming that it was the only possible end for Beauchamp : but he begged my mother to take ' my wife to the play and divert her thoughts.'

Mr. Meredith liked talking about the characters in his novels, but the very nearest approach to a quarrel that I ever had with him was when one day when we were walking together, I stoutly declared that Rose Jocelyn would never have talked to her lady's maid in the way she is represented as doing in *Evan Harrington.* He declared that she would, and she did, and he was really angry because I would not show myself convinced.

From my Diary

I suggested to Mr. Meredith that we should all enjoy reading his books so much more if he would condescend to make the language less involved and difficult to follow, and the story more easy to understand ; and I quoted to him the saying of another well-known writer : ' I am sure I should enjoy Meredith's novels, but I have no time to read *shorthand*.' In answer to this cool suggestion on my part, he replied : ' Yes, I know what you would like me to say : " She went upstairs, her heart was as heavy as lead," and so on with various other most conventional phrases.'

Mr. Meredith realised that *Richard Feverel* and *The Tale of Chloe*, or the poem *Modern Love* were unsuited for the very young to read, and in the first edition of that poem are printed the words :

' *This is not meat for little people nor for fools*.'

He thought that problems of this character should not be brought before the notice of ' seedling minds ' before they had any knowledge or experience of life.

Beauchamp's Career, though appreciated

by the elect, was not a popular success. He used to declare sarcastically that the general reading public wanted all their thinking done for them, and would refuse themselves to contribute any effort to understand.

CHAPTER IV

Mr. Meredith's cottage on the side of Box Hill was not in itself an interesting building.

A little square house with a tiny passage, a little sitting-room on one side and a little dining-room on the other. A staircase close to the front door mounts to the bedrooms overhead.

All the rooms were furnished very simply. I remember Mrs. Meredith's joy when she had a little window greenhouse opened in the side wall of her small sitting-room. There was a cottage piano against the opposite wall, and that with two or three chairs and a small table filled the room.

But what delightful memories are associated with these rooms in the minds of his friends.

How joyous was his welcome, not only in the firm grasp of his outstretched hand, but

in the beaming smile, with which he made his friends feel how truly glad he was to see them, and when the hour came for 'Farewell' I do not ever remember taking leave of him without his saying 'God bless you,' and his eyes gave benediction as well as his words.

A small carriage drive surrounded with very high box hedges led up to the front door. Behind the house there was an orchard garden on the side of the hill.

The house was very small, so in 1876 he built for himself at the top of his orchard a chalet containing a sitting-room and a bedroom. There was no view from any of the windows of Flint Cottage, which only looked upon the high box hedges surrounding the drive, but from the front of the chalet it was possible to look over the 'long green rollers of the Downs' towards Dorking, and to watch the shifting clouds and sunshine down the valley.

He was very happy with the plans for his new study, and we often went over from Pixholme while it was being built

to watch its progress. He simply gloated over the prospect of having a silent sitting-room to himself, where he could work surrounded by his books free from interruption.

The chalet was not quite finished when I went abroad with my parents to St. Petersburg, where the Oriental Congress was being held. My father, who was very learned in Oriental languages, was a delegate from England.

Before we left London I wrote to Mr. Meredith a long gushing letter about Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon*, which had greatly fascinated me, and I received in reply the following letter :

My dear Miss Brandreth,—This to speed you on your way, with the assurances that we poor abandoned souls look for your return—with the boots of Kazan (large-sized feet). The spelling of your letter shows carefulness. But what do you mean by ' sitting not taking in much beside the rhythm—— ? '

Do you mean in addition to ? or next neighbour to ? I am sure you enjoy that heavenly delight of young London ladies in solitude,

which consists in the poetic contemplation of themselves as looked on by the eternal hills: and to think you incapable of this exquisite reverie is to be unjust to you. . . . As to the Drama (a play he was then writing) it is ill-conceived as yet. I have been very busy; what I want is to lie fallow for a week, and I can't see the week.

Pecks of poetry have been coming from me. However, I will bear in mind that you wish the thing done. May fair weather attend you! I desire you to present my compliments to your father and mother, and tell them, I pray, that my vows are most heartily offered for the comfort of their journey, and against the prediction that the drift of the Oriental Congress will be to Constantinople. Adieu, my wife would send the warmest messages were she presiding over this pen.—Your faithfullest,

GEORGE MEREDITH.

After our return he was never tired of twitting me with my 'desertion of England,' calling me Princess Popiowoski and other Russian titles, and making endless jokes about my 'boots of Kazan,' the point of which I could not always see.

He wrote to my mother:

To sit with you all three and hear of your tour would be delightful, and what I hoped for; but

MR. MEREDITH'S COTTAGE ON BOX HILL

Photograph taken by J. E. H. Gordon, Esq., in 1872

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so it chances, I am under plight of promise to go to Brighton to my friend Mr. Morley, and this involves Friday and Saturday, and sad I am that it should. . . . I hear from Eva that Miss Brandreth will make an entry into our valley some time this month. How grand it would have been in boots of Kazan! But in any form it will be a wonderful refreshment to us. Please give my very warm regards to Mr. Brandreth and my cordial salutes to my Katharine (tamed). —Believe me, your most faithful and devoted

GEORGE MEREDITH.

After my return from Russia I went down to stay at Pixholme, and found Mr. Meredith very busy with literary work of all sorts—poetry and prose. The chalet was now finished, and this refuge enabled him to escape from visitors that he did not wish to see, and to immerse himself more and more in his work.

He was not nearly so easy of access as he had been before, and his wife had strict orders to let no one mount the garden to the chalet during his hours of work, and these became longer and more rigidly kept as time went on. No one dared to knock

at his study door, and the most we ventured to do, in the hope of attracting his attention, was to shout to the dogs outside in the orchard, trusting that he would hear and come out to join us before the declining sun forced us to return home.

On days that his work did not absorb him too much he was always glad to see us, and he enjoyed laughing at, and with me, over my Russian travels.

While I was abroad, I had heard a great deal of talk with various learned men, and one evening when I went up to see Mr. Meredith I found him alone, and we sat outside his chalet door looking down the valley, and I told him of my experiences at the Congress, and being very young at that time, I was perhaps impressed with an undue sense of my own merit and importance.

He listened to my loquacious chatter attentively, and then I remember well the advice that he gave me.

He spoke of the opening out of Life's obligations, and how earnestly I ought to

guard myself against self-satisfaction, and make up my mind to breast the waves of life with a stout heart. . . . He also said that the worst thing that could happen to any young man or woman was to whisper to themselves: 'Not I as commoner men!'

As the only cure for such fatal complacency he advised welcoming 'the comic spirit—the sword of common sense!'

I confessed to him how much disturbed I had been by the Vicomte de Rosny's epigram, which he had told me himself in Petersburg: 'Ceux qui croient en Dieu me font pitié, et ceux qui ne croient pas me font horreur.' He warned me against taking any epigram too seriously, and, amongst other wise things, he said that we should not ask for *personal gifts* in prayer. He reminded me of the saying in *Richard Feverel*:

'Who rises from his prayer a better man, his prayer is answered,' and added, with an intonation that I shall never forget: 'My dear, it is right and wholesome to kneel! A woman without re-

ligion is a weed upon the waters, or she is as hard as nails!'[1]

After listening with crimson cheeks to these words, I held my head low indeed, but cheered up a little when he said encouragingly as he bade me farewell: 'God bless you, my dear! I have hopes of you, you bear thwacks bravely.'

Mr. Meredith was no iconoclast, he never wanted to destroy or undermine any genuine beliefs, however much he might personally disagree with them. He never used conventional phrases, nor spoke on conventional lines on matters of the spirit, which I think was the reason why we were always impressed by his words, and also why they remained firmly fixed in the memory.

Perhaps sometimes he was a little relentless over the 'Discomfiture of presumption,' but I don't think any of his young friends could come away from hearing him talk without a strong desire to get rid of self-

[1] I found this well-remembered saying of his published later in *The Amazing Marriage*.

satisfaction and complacency, or without realising that, as units of a community, we had duties and obligations that we were bound to undertake if we would 'keep our souls on the surface of the waters.'

This particular talk with Mr. Meredith in front of his newly-built chalet in 1876 was memorable to me, because that day he told me that he thought his poems would outlive his novels, even though during his own lifetime they were hardly read at all. I asked him which of all his poems he liked best, and he replied at once:

'The verse in *Vittoria*,

> Our life is but a little holding, lent
> To do a mighty labour: we are one
> With Heaven and the stars, when it is spent,
> To serve God's aim.'

And these, his best loved lines, I rejoice to know, are printed on the little marble book that his children have placed at the head of his grave in the Dorking Valley Cemetery.

He was a great believer (as all wise men are) in the wholesomeness of work, and by his influence he started Eva Gordon on the grim and somewhat uncongenial task of translating a very learned German scientific book on languages, while, on my part, I tried to help my father a little in his work, and started daily classes for the shepherd boys in the Scotch valley where he rented a shooting.

After my return to London, I received this rhymed letter from Mr. Meredith :

Gordon Jim
Life and limb
Risking cos it is his whim
Hound to follow
Breaks his collar-
Bone while giving the view holler—
Ain't this news ?
What 's more it 's true.
There in bed the poor lad stews.
His neck twirling
Mr. Curling
Straight has set like surgeon sterling.

GEORGE MEREDITH.

In the summer of 1877 I became engaged to my cousin, Jim Gordon.

Mrs. Meredith was very kind to me during the year that my engagement lasted. I was very fond of her, and she put many little pleasures in my path. Her pretty rippling hair and welcoming smile remain gratefully in my memory, also her patience, for it must be told that Mr. Meredith used to think out problems while he talked to his wife and sons, and sometimes, without enough consideration, would let the lightning of his wit play about their heads. He did the same to all of us, but we only experienced it occasionally, it merely amused and interested us; but I often admired the wise if somewhat pained silence with which Mrs. Meredith followed her wayward husband's varying moods, as she listened to his experiments in sarcasm.

On our marriage Mrs. Meredith presented us with a pair of grey oriental vases in her own and her husband's name; and the day of my wedding she sent me the following lines, which Mr. Meredith had tossed into the waste-paper basket,

and which she had rescued for me, knowing how much I should prize them:

April 11*th*, 1878.

Now dawns all waxen to your seal of life
This day which names you bride to make you wife.
Time shows the solid stamp; then see, dear maid,
Round those joined hands — our prayers for you inlaid.

GEORGE and MARIE MEREDITH.

CHAPTER V

After my marriage I went to live for a while at Pixholme. During that summer Robert Louis Stevenson came with his mother to stay at the Burford Bridge Inn, about a quarter of a mile from Pixholme, and he brought with him a letter of introduction from Mr. Kegan Paul, the publisher, and a request that we should make him acquainted with Mr. Meredith, for whose novels 'R. L. S.' had a great admiration.

In my diary I find it recorded that he told us that he was 'a true-blue Meredith man.' They used to meet constantly in our garden, and one day Stevenson said to Mr. Meredith:

'How is it that you keep your heroines so charming? It 's no use my saying that mine are beautiful, and that every one is in love with them (mournfully),

they just turn ugly on my hands.' He used to tell Eva Gordon that he knew he should never succeed with women, adding 'reading Meredith has taught me that.'

Stevenson was a great dreamer, and when recounting his sleeping adventures in wonderland would say, after he had related a specially vivid dream: 'That will make a story some day!'

Mr. Meredith was very much interested in Stevenson, and as they sat on the lawn would draw many confidences from the eager young author, who himself had the art of drawing out the very best of Mr. Meredith's conversational powers, and his best was a marvel. In his turn Mr. Meredith would break staves of wit on the head of the younger man, which he sturdily parried, returning with vigour the elder man's hits.

Their mutual liking was pleasant to see, yet I remember feeling somewhat surprised when Mr. Meredith prophesied great things from Stevenson, and declared that some day we should all feel proud to have

known him. This long happy summer was full of laughter that appealed to the brain, as well as the heart.

The Gordons were all great people for picnics, and Mr. Meredith would often come with us or join us at tea-time. Among many other trivial reminiscences, I find these notes in my Diary:

We had a picnic on Box Hill, and when I rose to get the kettle off the stick fire for tea, Mr. Meredith (who was sitting still himself) called out to the other men present:

'Lives there a man with such base mettle
To let a lady lift a boiling kettle?'

After our picnic on Headley Common it came on to rain, and as we drearily trudged down the hill, with cloaks and umbrellas, and burdened with our tea-baskets, Mr. Meredith, with a grimace, called out to a passing friend:

'Behold! The funeral of picnic!'

One afternoon, in the garden at Pixholme, a cat sat in front of the tea-table washing her face. Mr. Meredith compared the cat 'Sahara' to a Mrs. D., a lady we knew, and said she was not yellow, but

pale red, washy brown, and dirty white, and he apostrophised the cat, and said: 'Dear Mrs. D., you are really wasting your time trying to beautify yourself!'

In the spring of 1899 my husband and I left Pixholme, and went to live in a little cottage on Holmwood Common, about four miles away. To inaugurate our new abode we gave a 'soap-bubble garden party.' Mr. and Mrs. Meredith drove over with Mrs. Gordon and Eva. It was a lovely day, the air was still, and the soap bubbles floated hither and thither, kept up by Japanese fans.

Mr. Meredith enjoyed the fun. He would not blow soap bubbles himself, but was most maliciously eager to persuade all the stoutest and most elderly members of the party to run about with their little fans after the fragile bubbles. While watching Mrs. N. W.'s efforts, Mr. Meredith whispered to me: 'I am doubly glad to see the dear woman, for she is *double* the size she was when last I saw her.'

In later life Mr. Meredith became more

serious in his conversation, and in his attitude towards life, but even in those days we were seldom long in his company without laughter. He himself had a most infectious laugh, and there is no doubt that his sense of humour was abnormally developed, and he could see comedy and farce where it could not be distinguished by duller mortals.

In 1880 my daughter Dorothy was born, and Mr. Meredith took great interest in the child. Unlike most men, he liked looking at little babies, and vowed that he adored them ' in the comet stage,' that is, with a tail of long clothes. He came to her christening, and declared that he had lost interest in the mother, and now only cared for the daughter, and in future I must expect to receive ' only the overflow of his affections.'

We used often to see his eldest son Arthur when he came to stay with his father and stepmother on Box Hill. I remember him well as a bright-eyed and very intelligent youth, who talked easily

and well on subjects that he was interested in. For reasons of health, and also for business, in which later he was engaged at Lille, Arthur was obliged to live a good deal abroad, and having inherited, through his uncle, a small independence, he was able to live his life on the lines that he preferred. From time to time he made his appearance at the Cottage, when it was evident that his father enjoyed his company, and liked bringing him over to see his old friends.

One day I drove over to lunch with Mr. Meredith and Arthur (Mrs. Meredith was away on a visit) in our high dogcart, and in getting down from the elevated perch caught my dress, missed my footing, and fell, bruising and hurting myself considerably. Mr. Meredith was always a little impatient of anything that delayed or interrupted conversation, and was not over sympathetic at my mishap and dishevelled condition, but Arthur was solicitous, and fetched a servant and hot water and brushed me down, and I was grateful

to him for his kindness. After order was restored, we had a very pleasant luncheon, when Mr. Meredith was at his best, and revelled in conversation with his son, in his account of his experiences abroad, and more especially in his talk about recent French books and publications.

My husband having been made electrical engineer to the Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company, we were obliged to give up our cottage and went to live in London. He was very pleased to be able to offer a position in the works to Mr. Meredith's younger son, William Maxse.

Before leaving our country home, I wrote to tell Mr. Meredith how grateful I felt to him for all the sturdy advice and help he had given to me ever since my childhood, and how much I rejoiced that his son would be with my husband in his new position at the works at Greenwich. He replied :

My dear Mrs. Jim,—The close of your letter touches one of the deepest chords, to me very

thrillingly. I thought in that time only of my wish to point a very promising plant the way of light, and found its natural tendency thitherward in a fairly straight line —with deviations for the sake of harmony. I am getting to be more and more of a recluse: but this month generally London has hold of me.

I shall be delighted to have an evening with you and Jim, who has done more to move my heart to gratitude than can be put in speech. But when in London I will beseech to be driven to you. Will has, I am led to believe, thoroughly taken to the *idea* of studying his work. I hope the study will follow.—I am very warmly and faithfully yours, GEORGE MEREDITH.

Mr. Meredith went down to see his son at work, and found him absorbed in calculations in a lean-to corrugated iron hut. He wrote to me to tell me of his visit, finishing his letter with this rhyme:

When Will was at home in his palace of zinc,
He had no room to move; but plenty to think!

Unfortunately the early history of electrical lighting in England was full of disasters for the pioneers, and matters did not

develop as we had hoped and expected. I received many letters from both Will's father and mother written at this time, which I greatly treasure.

My husband wrote to ask Mr. Meredith if he could get an important scientific book by Professor Clark Maxwell reviewed in the papers, to which request he replied :

My dear Jim,—Greenwood gave me the promise, I suppose that a mere literary editor opening the book must have recoiled at the aspect of the hieroglyphic pages. I can perceive my own affright at being expected to say a candid word of the contents. I will take the first opportunity of speaking to him—writing further would but worry : but I anticipate that he will say he has no one on his staff to master a scientific book : popular though you may call it. But cabalistically popular, we think it, who never hardly pushed a nose, and that hastily withdrawn from that anti-chamber of the Arcana of figures.—I grieved to miss that breakfast with you, your wife and Butcher—now do think of appointing another day when you can join the hand and dine and sleep here. I breakfast (alone) by new doctor's rules—and very effective they are—at eleven, then fast till

seven. We will bed Butcher at the Burford—and have a jolly evening! I am again in good vein for work, but physically dependent on bracing weather. My love to your wife.—Yours ever warmly, GEORGE MEREDITH.

CHAPTER VI

Mrs. Meredith's health had given much cause for grave anxiety. On 1st April 1885, Mr. Meredith wrote to me:

I grieved at missing you. Will gives me news of you from time to time, though not of the 'Elvastons,' of whom I wish to hear. When I am easier in mind about the state of my wife, I shall be glad to propose myself as the guest of a day. She is at Eastbourne with her sisters, and Mariette is there, and Will goes down on Thursday; I likewise—to Admiral Maxse next door for a week. . . .

Give my love to Jim, it will not be lessened by your sharing it.—Very faithfully ever,

George Meredith.

Mrs. Meredith's health became worse and worse, and in June of that year all hope of her recovery was abandoned, and she returned with her husband to their cottage on Box Hill. We were then living in a

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little house we had taken for the summer and autumn months at Ewell, and I constantly went over to see Mrs. Meredith, who suffered terribly during the last few months of her life. Yet to the last she retained her pleasant smile of welcome, and the words she wrote in French, for she could no longer speak, the last day I saw her were a cheerful jest about two elderly ladies whose admiration of her husband and his writing gave her much amusement.

As both Mr. and Mrs. Meredith feared the strain of her sad illness on their young daughter Mariette, I wrote asking them to send the child over to us at Ewell, to which letter Mr. Meredith sent the following reply:

August 4th, 1885.

My dear Mrs. Jim,—Your letter inviting Mariette is timely, and you are one to whom I can trust my Dearie. The child is getting strained; she wants change and rest. She has done everything in the house for the comfort of her mother.

If you can take her in on Thursday, I will bring her by the train touching Ewell at

12.40 P.M. Let me hear. I shall be bound for London, so that I will beg you to send a maid to meet the girl. There is nothing new save signs of increasing weakness. . . . *

She had some fear of the girl's being put on horseback by the pair of fanatics for riding. But I assured her you would wait till the sanction of the riding school had been obtained. It was but one of the apprehensions of an invalid. She likes to think of the girl with you and Jim.

I will come and fetch my Dearie. . . .

My love to you both, our hearts in thanks.

GEORGE MEREDITH.

Death (which Mr. Meredith used to call 'the friend without whom life were impossible') released his wife on 17th September 1885, and that same day he came over to stay with us at Ewell to be with his 'dearie girl.' His sad words 'that imagination makes the sufferings of those we love a torture to the mind,' linger in my memory.

In those first days of his great loss we saw a great deal of him. Not only was his girl staying with us, but we had known and tenderly loved his wife. His sorrow was sacred to us, we felt it a real privilege to be

allowed to try and help him during those first sad weeks.

I was not in good health at that time, and was therefore prevented from going over with my husband to Mrs. Meredith's funeral in Dorking Valley Cemetery, and Mariette and I spent the day alone together. After it was over I received the following letter:

Box Hill, *Sept.* 22*nd*, 1885.

Dear Mrs. Jim, — On Sunday I was at Effingham Hill. To-night Will leaves for Normandy, and I stay here to see him start.

To-morrow I will accept your invitation, taking Mariette with me . . . most grateful for your kindness to the dearie.

We had sunshine on Monday at the grave. I like the plot of earth, and have bought enough for the family. . . .

Adieu, with my full love to you both.

George Meredith.

Box Hill, *Oct.* 15*th*, 1885.

Dear Mrs. Jim,—We will do our best to entertain you on Tuesday, and with gladness.

Mariette is with Admiral Maxse at Weybridge. I or my son Arthur will bring her home on Monday.

After his wife's death the education of his daughter Mariette was Mr. Meredith's deepest interest and care.

In my endeavours to help him, I interviewed governesses, dentists, dressmakers, and music teachers, and did all I could to aid him in his difficult and lonely task; but the best was barely good enough for his 'dearie girl.'

Box Hill, *Oct.* 12*th*, 1885.

Dear Mrs. Jim,—Your account of the lady you propose is excellent, and takes me. It would give me a home to have Mariette here with me with her, and I think my girl would be happy. . . .

The lady would have the prospect of a dull life. Could she bear it? If so verily my inclinations are that way. Madlle. Souvestre is full at present. I have alternatively a good report of a Miss Branston, sister of Archbishop Benson's wife, who at Croydon has eight girls in her house, and who is, I hear, an admirable manager and reader of the genus girl.—Yours warmly,

George Meredith.

I think the various ladies that he saw must have been bewildered by the many drastic admonitions they received.

I remember one perplexed English lady, who later became Mariette's governess, after we had arranged an interview between her and Mr. Meredith at our house, said to us.

'He talked to me for a long time, and skipped across the centuries for examples of female education, but really I don't know if he will engage me or not, and I am rather frightened at the many things he will not permit his daughter to do.'

He had very decided ideas as to the meticulous care that should be taken in every particular of young growing girls.

He would never allow Mariette to travel alone, even the very short distance by train from Box Hill to Ewell, a maid had always to be sent with her or to fetch her. He never allowed her to walk by herself, and he was most particular to address her letters to 'c/o Mrs. J. E. H. Gordon.' I have heard him hurl diatribes against parents or any one else writing to a girl 'c/o the Master of the House.' We tried to live up to all these injunctions. I

realise now that we made many mistakes, but the poor harassed father knew that we were trying to do our best to help him, and was most affectionately grateful to us for our efforts.

Arthur Meredith's health was at this time causing anxiety. He was very fond of his half-sister Mariette, and she went constantly to see him during his last illness. Mr. Meredith wrote to me on 18th October 1886.

My dear Mrs. Jim,—You must be full of work and care in anticipation of Jim's departure (for America), and my reply will not seem too tardy. . . . (Here followed details about his daughter's governess.)

Now when I come to London I am bound to give all my spare time to my eldest son (Arthur) lying ill at St. Thomas' Hospital.

With good speed to Jim away and back glory, profit, health.—I am ever warmly yours,

George Meredith.

Mr. Meredith's longer letters were chiefly written about his own private affairs or mine, and are therefore not suitable for

publication, but even his shortest notes contained some expression or turn of phrase that led to their preservation.

Box Hill, *May 16th*, 1888.

My dear Mrs. Jim,—It was like you to think of the pleasure your news of Will (his son) would give me, and act upon it. . . . This year my damsel threatens to drag me to Scotland. If she had a taste for Alpine scenery I would take her to Tyrol. . . . All is going smoothly here. The Miss attending her is very good and companionable. Some Friday she may propose to visit you at midday, on her way to lessons with Madame Haas. She is also having singing lessons; but she catches a cold intermittently, her friends may still count on her paying her duties to them. Remember me warmly to Jim, not forgetting Mr. Butcher.—Your most faithful,

George Meredith.

Box Hill, *July 10th*, 1888.

Dear Mrs. Jim,—Our engagements both in receiving friends and going forth to them are close up to the time of our start for South Wales, whither we go to be near the son. . . . I have had the intention of running to Collingham from Victoria now and again, but I come so rarely to town that when there I am at once taken and

treated as a cab horse; I never can go the way I would, where is my pasture. . . . As for me, I delight to be thought of, but shall have to work. Nothing but duty to this girl (his daughter) would drive me from home at present; my return must be into harness. Very oddly people have been conspiring lately to belabour me with invitations to dinner. I count two from persons I have never seen; and they name lunch, if dinner does not suit. However to you I will always come, and gladly when I can. Give my love to Jim and dear Butcher and my blessing to the babes, also kind messages to the Elvastons.—Your affectionate friend,

GEORGE MEREDITH.

MY DEAR MRS. JIM,—I would have asked for a postponement of a week, as I have a volume in hand, and I dread your finding my attention incessantly fixed on it like a juggler's eyes on the ball he tosses and catches. But on the whole it is better for me to feel myself due, and I shall have great pleasure in seeing 'Pixholme' and 'Elvastons' when I come to you, besides the domestic pleasures. I will not petition to delay it, and will name Monday the 26th as you kindly give me the choice.

Your servant, admirer and friend begs you to receive the assurance of his perfect fidelity, signing himself GEORGE MEREDITH.

CHAPTER VII

In 1889 I wrote a book on *Decorative Electricity* which had an ephemeral success, as it was the subject in which every one was interested at that time.

I also contributed several articles to magazines and papers, and I was so bitten with the joy of scribbling that, encouraged by Mr. Meredith, I wrote a novel called *Eunice Anscombe.* He, poor kind friend! read all the manuscript and most patiently corrected and suppressed many passages.

He was interested in the idea that I wanted to develop: the contrast of two girls, one whose life had been ruined by an unfathered infant, and the other, a young girl whose faith in God had been undermined by a thoughtless man of the world who could give her nothing to compensate for the shipwreck of her spiritual life.

The quotation on the title-page was taken from *Diana of the Crossways*.

> The light of every soul burns upwards,
> Let us make allowance for atmospheric disturbances.

Mr. Meredith thought the problem worth working out, but he feared that I had not the skill, or the patience to develop it properly; and he pointed out I had not prepared my readers for the climax of the story by making them sufficiently interested in the character of the heroine, who he feared was rather 'colourless.'

His criticism was perfectly just, and the novel, though it received some good reviews, was a failure, as perhaps it deserved to be, but his understanding sympathy over the foundering of my little literary ship was great, and it revealed to me how much he himself must have suffered in his youth from the comparative failure of his own early ventures. One day he said to me, 'Console yourself by thinking that you have said what you wanted to say—and that is a very great gain!'

He was very fond of the French plays, and he several times came to stay with us in London in order that he might enjoy the delightful acting of Judec, Réjanne, Chaumont, and other great actresses.

I remember on one occasion my husband and I went with him to see a play, and Mr. Meredith was dismayed to see how many young girls were present among the audience, because the play was a *risqué* one, very funny, but replete with the *esprit gaulois*, which made ripples of laughter pass through the theatre. He was so disconcerted that it quite spoilt his own amusement, and he kept murmuring to us: 'How can the mothers allow their daughters to remain?' We suggested that most of the girls did not understand what they were laughing at. He said: 'The modern girl being better educated than her parents generally understands French much better than her mama!'

Mr. Meredith was a close observer whenever he went to a play; I don't think he ever missed any feature in the acting, and

when we returned home would point out to us shades and interpretations that we had never observed ourselves. He was an enthusiastic admirer of *L'enfant Prodigue*, the wordless play. I twice had the pleasure of seeing it with him. The French actress who took the part of the old mother received his special commendation, and he said after the performance: 'My dear! Fancy the delight of sitting opposite that woman at breakfast every morning!'

About this time I was appointed chairman of a small committee that was formed to collect a representative library of books written by English women to send to the Women's Building of the Chicago Exhibition. Miss Charlotte Yonge, Mrs. Humphry Ward, Miss Agnes Clarke, and Mrs. J. R. Green were upon this Committee, and I found the work it entailed of advertising for and buying the necessary books very absorbing and amusing, and I remember feeling quite vexed with Mr. Meredith that he would show nothing but 'patient inattention,' because he said that

literature should always be judged as such, and consideration as to which sex had produced a book should not be allowed to influence the judgment passed upon it; and he refused to be told any details of our choice of books, or, much to my disappointment, to proffer any advice in their selection.

On the other hand, from the very first he was interested in the Suffrage, and his 'Ballad of Fair Ladies in Revolt' is the best expression of his sympathies and opinions, hopes and fears, on that subject. His improvised rhymes on Women's Suffrage it is perhaps more discreet to suppress, though they were extremely funny, and amused us all.

He would often tell us long tales and novels that he had in his mind, and one memorable afternoon, while walking on Box Hill, he told me the whole story of *One of Our Conquerors*, which he had then hardly begun to write, and, as I listened to his wonderful voice telling of the tragic history of Nathalie and the dawning

wonder of Nesta, I thought it must surely prove to be the greatest novel in the world; but though there are many powerful scenes and sayings in the book, I confess that when the novel was published I was disappointed: it seemed as if the 'gleam,' 'the light that never was on land or sea,' had departed from it, obscured by the whirl of words.

Some other stories he told me from time to time, of which, alas! I only remember fragments. One tragic tale, however, I remember distinctly. It was the tale of two friends who loved the same woman; the richer of the two married her, and the other, after a few years had passed, discovered that his friend's wife had always loved him the best. She would have been willing to leave her home, and depart with him, but he would not be disloyal to his friend, whom he loved more than a brother, and in desperation shot himself. He left no letter or explanation, and the wife had to tell her own husband the story of his friend's sacrifice. As he told this

story in the twilight one summer evening, it was full of dignity and beauty, and with passages of real poetry in it. I felt almost glad to have only the memory of it in his spoken words, and never to have seen it in print.

Another long story that lasted several visits was of twin brothers who were brought up in different walks of life, only to know each other at the end of their lives. This story was brought back to my mind when I read William de Morgan's *When Ghost meets Ghost.* I wish to note here that during the forty-one years that my friendship with Mr. Meredith lasted, I never on one single occasion heard him tell any story, or even make any remark which could have offended the most scrupulous sense of propriety. He was full of fun and humour, and when enjoying his company we often laughed till our sides ached. One day he said in my hearing, when some one was speaking about the comic short stories of the famous French writer Maupassant: 'They are

really improper. You had better not read them'; then added, '*I could be funny* if I neglected the proprieties as he does!'

I do not ever remember hearing him swear, but I do recall to mind his declaring one day that though 'a good hearty oath might be a necessary relief to a man upon a critical occasion, the constant use of oaths was a proof of a bucolic mind and a limited vocabulary.'

From my Diary

I enjoyed a very cheerful tea at Mr. Meredith's. Mr. Arthur Blount (Arthur Cecil the actor) was there, and we sat in the orchard. He was exceedingly amusing and made us all laugh with his imitations of the actresses of the day, and their ideas of really lady-like deportment. When he hurried away to catch his train, saying that he must return in time to eat a slight meal before acting, Mr. Meredith called after him:

'The Bumble Bee—the Bumble Bee,
He *had* to get home to his early tea.'

Mr. Meredith's deafness was now increasing, and his infirmities of gait and movement, owing to illness, were more

noticeable, and in consequence he did not like making new acquaintances, and preferred to see his friends alone if possible.

During these months we often went over to see him, only to find him in obvious pain and discomfort. His faithful servant and gardener, Cole, did all he could to help him, but he was not a trained nurse, and so he was not able to save his master from miserable days and nights of illness; but Mr. Meredith was very grateful to him for his well-meaning efforts, and one afternoon he told me that he had just given Cole the manuscript of *Richard Feverel* and one or two other parts of novels, for he thought that some day the gardener would be able to sell them, and he was glad to think he should receive some reward for his devotion. It is interesting to know that after Mr. Meredith's death Cole was able to sell these same manuscripts for a very large sum. Mr. Meredith was also in the habit of giving Cole copies of his own books. Amongst other books so given, Cole specially treasures a copy of *Harry*

Richmond, in which these words are written :

Frank Cole,
from his friend,
George Meredith.

A good servant cancels the name of Master.
Dec. 10th, 1899.

That same day Mr. Meredith said to me : ' I don't feel well, dear. I feel like the acid drop after the boy had kept it a long time in his mouth, when he says to himself, " I 've sucked enough, I 'll scrunch ! " '

Later he wrote :

Dear Mrs. Jim,—Monday will suit me. Prithee do not come to fast. 1000 thanks for your grandmotherly cappy considerateness to sick old child. G. M.

A few days later I lunched with him, and he remarked with a weary sigh : ' My body is getting very old and infirm, and the youngster inside me is always objecting to it.'

Dearest Mrs. Jim,—I am still in Dr.'s hands,

MAGDALEN COLLEGE LIBRAR

the complaint being this mortal machine on its downward slope.

My love to you all. GEORGE MEREDITH.

In 1892 Mr. Meredith went to a nursing home in London, where he underwent an operation. I went to see him there once or twice, and found him each time in a most jocund mood. He was immensely amused by his first experience of being under an anæsthetic, and those who knew him well will understand how funny were his Arabian Nights experiences, which he never forgot, and often alluded to afterwards.

After his recovery I went once or twice to tea with him at the Garrick Club, of which he was a member. He enjoyed showing his friends the rare pictures and drawings, and regaling them with the muffins for which the Club was famous.

One day, down at Dorking, he said to an old and intimate woman friend of his :

'I 've known you, my dear, all your

life. You have a flighty and misleading manner, but behind that manner you have (strange to say) a remarkably steady and dependable brain.'

He came often to see us during 1892. He was very fond of young children, and while willing to be helpful about my writing ventures, he never failed to point out that the 'services of the nest' was the first duty of mothers with young children.

Once while he was staying with us an accident happened to my baby; and when the doctor had paid his visit and calmed our fears, I found that my guest had departed, without even waiting for his luggage, which had to be sent after him, so afraid was he (as he explained in a letter) of 'taking up the mother's time, and distracting the household's attention from the infant.'

About this time his youngest son, William Maxse, became engaged to Miss Elliot, and naturally my husband and I took the keenest friendly interest in the

affair. In answer to a letter I wrote to Mr. Meredith, he replied:

Feb. 4th, 1892.

DEAREST MRS. JIM,—Riette has gone to town to-day, and as she has been going for several weeks of late, you might hold over your hospitable invitations—till we both can come? I shall read your new work (the novel *Eunice Anscombe*) in serious mood be assured. There is a copy of *Modern Love* that was destined for you, but is at present in air midway between the publisher and me. . . .

Will's affair will have to depend on his worldly affairs. . . . Ask Jim whether his whirring dynamo of a brain has flung to nothing Will's questions—and be so good as to send poor Will a word. . . .

The damsel is one worth having, favourable under a smiling sky; and you would warmly approve her person, her nature, her accomplishments and her conditions. My love to you all.

GEORGE MEREDITH.

CHAPTER VIII

On 3rd February 1893 Mr. Gordon was killed by his horse falling with him.

Mr. Meredith wrote to me:

Feb. 4th, 1893.

Dearest Friend,—My hopes and thoughts are with you. I cannot ask you to be comforted —under such a blow the soul is on the waters and must swim of its own strength. I have faith in your strength, that is all I can say. For me it is also a blow—and it will be to Will, and I think of the mother as well as the wife.

My condition forbids moving or I would come to town, on the chance of two minutes. But yet, at this moment, you are better away, perhaps, even from friends.

Know them to be with you in spirit as mine is. —Tenderly yours, George Meredith.

For some time my life was very unhappy and unsettled.

In the spring I went to stay for a day or two with Mr. Meredith and his daughter at the Cottage.

From my Diary, April 1893.

I went down to Box Hill to stay with the Merediths, and found no sentiment but a wise 'surgeon friend.' He said to me, 'You have now been given the opportunity of your life—and will you sink beneath the waters?

You have a mind: use it, or it will bite you.

You have had the advantage of a very good and careful education, but the great disadvantage of only seeing life from one point of view.

Many other councils he gave me, and his bracing friendship was the greatest value to me during those difficult days. I think one reason why his advice was so helpful to any friend, in anxieties and perplexities, was that he always appealed to the heart and brain, and not to the emotions. No teacher of Vedic philosophy could be more scrupulously careful than he was to avoid purely emotional appeals.

Amongst other visitors at Flint Cottage, I constantly met Mr. X., one of his very oldest friends.

One summer evening as Mr. X. and I walked back to the station and travelled back to London together, he told me the

early history of Mr. Meredith's first marriage, and early literary struggles to maintain himself. Upon all these matters Mr. X. had accurate and trustworthy contemporary information. It was a very moving story that he related, and every detail remains in my memory. All that I can say of it here is that the history of his engagement to his first wife, and of his relations with her generally, was very different from that suggested in a recent publication.

His first wife, Mrs. Nicolls, was the only daughter of Thomas Love Peacock, the author, for whose writings Mr. Meredith always professed the most sincere admiration. The first book he ever published, in 1851, a volume of poems, bears this inscription:

To
THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK, Esq.
this volume
is dedicated with the profound admiration and
affectionate respect of his
Son-in-Law.
Weybridge, *May* 1851.

He used to declare that it was a great advantage to him in his youth to have been associated with Peacock, and that Peacock's writings had been a great model for him. It is quite easy in comparing the novels of Mr. Meredith with those of his father-in-law to trace the influence that helped to form his style, and in doing so perhaps to regret that he had not chosen another model.

One day I received a request from the editor of a well-known magazine to contribute an article upon 'George Meredith.' I, of course, refused at once, but thinking it would amuse Mr. Meredith to hear about it I told him of the proposal. He got quite warm upon the subject, and I find it recorded in my diary that:

I told Mr. Meredith about Mr. —— wanting me to write an article in his magazine about 'George Meredith,' and he said: 'Never write anything about me. Never! My books are never read, so why should any one want to know about me? No, my dear! *don't do it*! You know me too well!'

I promised him I would not, but, after a pause, I said to him: 'I will never write about you,

unless after your death some person who does not know you well should write about you unworthily so as to give a wrong impression . . . then I shall consider myself absolved from this promise and shall try my little best to tell of the " George Meredith " as I knew him, and what his friendship has been to me.' He shrugged his shoulders.

On another occasion I told him I had been asked to write a series of papers about the heroines of his novels, and he seemed to like this idea, and promised me to do all he could to help me, and when I bid him good-bye he reminded me with a humorous smile to remember that Renée and *not* Cecilia in *Beauchamp's Career* was his best beloved character—and I was to be sure not to forget it.

This project never matured. It was a great loss for me personally to have missed the pleasure of talking over his heroines with their creator; otherwise I have no regrets, as I am sure that my capabilities would never have been equal to the task of writing worthily of Lucy Feverel, Rhoda Fleming, Sandra Belloni, and Diana of the Crossways.

CHAPTER IX

Mr. Meredith used to express opinions upon the contemporary writings of his day, as well as on the great authors of former times, very frankly.

His remarks upon the writings of many famous living authors were illuminating and amusing; but for obvious reasons it seems undesirable to publish them, and I am sure he would not have wished that the casual remarks passed during conversation should be printed and given to the world as his considered opinions.

No one disliked more than he did exaggerated praise of any kind on any subject. As he often said to young writers, 'superlatives weaken style, and to praise with discrimination is a task to strain the powers of the most capable of reviewers.'

I have often thought that there is a perverse streak in the dispositions of men

—from which Mr. Meredith was no more exempt than any other man—that makes them dislike to hear expressions of admiration, while women, on the contrary, love to hear praise.

Being myself an enthusiastic admirer of Jane Austen's novels, I could not induce him to share, or even tolerate, my eulogies upon her style and presentment of character. Indeed, one day he declared that the heroines of her books were wanting in refinement; if any one else had written *Pride and Prejudice* he should consider that the Miss Bennets could at times be vulgar. Jane Austen's heroes he frankly detested, and made us laugh heartily with speeches caricaturing her style, made by priggish young gentlemen to the maidens of their choice.

One afternoon I talked with him about the writings of 'Fiona Macleod,' and he told me that he knew that 'Fiona Macleod,' the mystical writer, was really William Sharpe, but he sincerely hoped that Mr. Sharpe would never know that he had

penetrated the secret of his pseudonym. He admired his work, and had the deepest comprehension of and sympathy with his wish 'to hide his journalistic appearance under a veil.'

We were talking about the poems and drawings of William Blake. Then turning the conversation too quickly, I said that I was always so much interested in anything that was written about the devil. Mr. Meredith, pretending to be deaf (he often had a rather effective way of doing this), said 'I am so fond of his songs of Innocence!'

Speaking of Walt Whitman, I asked him if he did not agree that he might be of use at certain crucial times in people's lives, and suggested that his 'Song of those who have failed' might prove a help to the unfortunate. Then he told me that his sonnet 'An Orson of the Muse' was intended for Walt Whitman, many of whose poems he admired, but that he feared that his teachings

> Must sink beneath the tide-waves of their weight,
> If in no vessel built for sea they swim,

meaning that his language and style were too uncouth and undisciplined to carry his thoughts safely through the ages.

One day he said to me that 'if any one wanted to make money in literature nowadays they had better write a *risqué* novel, and then go to Mr. Stead and look into his "North Sea eyes" and say "I am a nail, drive me in!" Then Stead with a Nasmyth hammer would drive you straight into the brain of the British public!'

Another day, after he had been reading French Memoirs, of which he was especially fond, he pretended to have found this story:

'Once upon a time a very wicked man died and went down to hell—he had been so very wicked that he was received with acclamations by the crowds in the streets, and his Satanic Majesty himself came down his palace steps to receive him, and with an indulgent smile shook his finger at him and exclaimed: 'Mais vous avez un peu dépassé mes ordres.'

Referring to Martin Tupper, he said he was a 'cold hash of Solomon.' As to A. B.,

a minor poet much read at that time, he described him as a 'badly made blancmange.'

Mr. Meredith often talked about the construction of the 'Short Story,' for which there is always a steady demand for use in magazines and weekly provincial papers. He considered there were few short stories of merit written in the English language, and to find the really artistically told tale we must go to the French. He agreed that the short stories of Kipling were (with some exceptions that he mentioned) *hors concours*, and then he proceeded to speak of the writings of 'Q' which he greatly admired. He then read aloud the story called *The May Morning*, and declared that it was one of the very best in the English language, 'full of an admirable and rare combination of pathos and reticence.'

He recommended authors to study the writings of Lafcadio Hearn, as he considered that 'his style was so admirably adapted in every case to the impression he wished to convey.' He thought some of his special

faculty was due to his cosmopolitan origin and environments, as his father was Irish, his mother a Greek, and he was educated and lived in America during his early life, and afterwards married a Japanese lady and lived and taught in Japan.

Of ' Gyp ' he said that among her very amusing but ephemeral writings there was one novel that deserved to live—*Une Passionette*, and added : ' Of course, that is just the one book of hers that is least read by the public.'

One afternoon I found him reading Faguet's book on Nietzsche. I don't think he liked Nietzsche : he thought his upside-down ideas could not be of any benefit to women, though they might have some value for ' aged men like himself.'

One day we were talking about Balzac. I had arrived hot with admiration from the perusal of *Illusions Perdues*, and was pleased to find that he fully shared my enthusiasm for that book.

He used to amuse himself by looking through the advertisements in the daily

papers. He would say, half in jest, that they were to his mind the most instructive part of the paper. He would read them out, and then start making up stories, tragic, funny, and farcical, about the people who had inserted them, and declared that he was certain many authors had obtained ideas for their stories from the advertisement pages. Knowing this habit of his, we sometimes brought him cuttings from the agony columns and advertisement pages of the papers. I remember well his amusement at an advertisement we had cut from the pages of the *Daily Telegraph*:

> Wanted by a firm of butchers . . .
> A Christian young man to do the killing.

I once sent him a verse written by a very clever child of thirteen years of age to my dog, a tiny black Pomeranian:

TO BERTIE BUTCHER, EGOIST

Truly this dog in mind hath soar'd to distances sublime,
Far, far beyond all human things—except at dinner-time.

Unbending, reticent and of demeanour most severe,
To blandishments of alien tongues impervious is his ear.
Wondrous in sooth it is to me—wondrous to one and all
To find his inner soul so great, his outer form so small.
Amid a crowd of worshippers, living his life alone,
In contemplation of the great and glorious *Number One!*
Bow down, bow down, ye lower minds—cursed who dares deride
This little dog composed of tail, and little else but pride:

and received in answer the following letter:

Box Hill,
Dorking, *Oct.* 1, 1901.

My dear Mrs. Butcher,—The child is remarkable. I hope she will be carefully trained (not pedantically and not made conceited by tasks for exhibition of her powers); left to run between tuition and wildness. It may be a precocious aptitude. The like has been seen and it passes. The humour gives me warmer anticipations, for quality is there, and that does not pass. If she has a big head, her present quickness is very promising.

My love to Dorothy, the overflow to you.—
George Meredith.

As he seemed interested in M. (the young authoress), I forwarded him some more of her verses, and, after reading them, he replied :

Box Hill,
Dorking, *Oct.* 20, 1901.

My dear Mrs. Butcher,—It may be grained in this very remarkable child, or still be no more than a mere wonderfully precocious talent. She has the music of verse. I have not seen any failure, either of redundancy or halting, in a line. She requires, of course, affectionate interest, but not such encouragement as the seeing her verses in print. That may have the effect of stamping her turns of expression on her mind and words. But genius will in the end overcome anything. The two pieces you point to are excellent. I do trust that no noise will be made about M. for some years. . . . For your 'toujours perdrix' my thanks run to my last coppers. Most warmly,

George Meredith.

In these days, when a free run of the library bookshelves is often advocated for girls, it is of interest to record how much Mr. Meredith insisted upon great care in the choice of books for the young.

This is all the more worthy of notice when we remember that he was from first to last the apostle of liberty for women, but it must be a sane and wholesome liberty.

CHAPTER X

In 1894 Mr. Meredith's daughter Mariette married Mr. Henry Parkman Sturgis. She went to live at Givons, near Leatherhead, about two and a half miles from her father's cottage.

The distance was not great, and she went over constantly to see him, and to write letters for him, and to help him entertain his friends, but naturally her new life occupied her time, and Mr. Meredith was left more alone. But he was never bored with his own company, his own mind was a constant amusement to him, and his work occupied his thoughts which often made him a little impatient of interruption.

Mr. Meredith liked his friends to tell him their anxieties and difficulties about the upbringing of their children. He was always much interested in young

people and their aspirations; and he would quote to us from his own poems the lines:

> Thou under stress of the strife,
> Shalt hear for sustainment supreme
> The cry of the conscience of Life:
> *Keep the young generation in hail*
> *And bequeath them no tumbled house.*

I once consulted him about my daughter Dorothy's wish to leave her own home and work among the poor in the East End. I was greatly perplexed as to what I had better do in the matter. On the whole, I think Mr. Meredith's sympathies were more with the girl than with her mother. In answer to a letter from me he wrote:

I feared to touch on a sore in writing to you. . . . These young women, when they determine on an independent course, obey a healthy impulse of their natures and are promising well for the future of their race. I can even feel the loss a mother looking for companionship and immediate sympathy must sustain; when I say that, it should not be left to remain a wound, and I have confidence both in your heart and in your clear head. You will see it to be a matter of character—which is full of better

things to come than if the girl were quiescent. Forgive me for touching on it—Dorothy binds me more closely to my old friend. That is what love means.

Knowing his interest in the young, I used to talk to him about the perplexities of my women friends as to the upbringing of their children, both boys and girls, and the growing tendencies of young people of our time to independence and self-complacency. In this connection he said to me: 'Nothing against Nature can be right, nor can it endure. A tree must be well rooted in earth before it can bear leaves or flowers.'

We talked of the influence of the Roman Catholic Church upon certain types of mind. I think no form of sacerdotal religion appealed to him much, but he acknowledged 'that he was constrained to admire the practical teaching and skill of that church in guiding souls.'

One afternoon Miss M. was speaking to him in rapturous terms of the strenuous work of some girl she knew at a London

Mission. Mr. Meredith, who disliked superlatives (he has been called the 'Apostle of Sanity'), quoted from his poem 'Jump to Glory Jane' the lines:

> An endless holiday they had of pleasure in a serious work.

He went on to speak of the dangers to the young, of their own haste 'to leap to seats angelical,' and of the consequent evils of spiritual complacency. He feared the subtle effect of asceticism upon character, and one day, when we were discussing the dominating influence of Ritualistic Church teaching on the young, he said that 'a girl under the obsession of these ideas was like a tall tower with windows on one side only.'

Speaking of the dangers of spiritual complacency—a subject on which he was always eloquent and emphatic,—he reminded me of these lines in his 'Song of Theodilinda':

> God's own gifts
> Have a devil for the weak;
> Yea, the very force that lifts
> Finds the vessel's secret leak.

He deprecated sarcasm and irony in dealing with enthusiastic feminine natures, but, as always, he commended laughter as the most splendid corrective to complacency, and said 'that a woman should train herself to look at herself from outside, and to learn, or rather teach herself, to laugh at herself. I call to mind the closing verses of his poem, 'The Appeasement of Demeter':

> Laughter! O thou reviver of sick Earth!
> Good for the spirit, good
> For body, thou! to both art wine and bread!

The words Fortitude, Foresight, and Patience, were constantly used by him, and these three words as spoken by him were a sermon in themselves.

One day a friend of his was discussing with him the summer plans that he was making for his daughters—two very fashionable young ladies. Mr. Meredith was of opinion that it was very good for the young to see beautiful scenery, and he urged the father to take his girls to the Tyrol for their holidays.

The gentleman pursed his lips, and did not reply, so Mr. Meredith turned to us and said in a tone of amused pity: 'The Alps. The Alps indeed! The dear girls would liefer look at the Albert Hall!'

He was amused by my suggestion that the modern mother was much like a bewildered wren when she discovered that her nest was full of aspiring cuckoos, and by the new version of the Fifth Commandment sent to me by a friend:

'Honour thy son and thy daughter that thy days may be *allowed* to linger in the land.'

One day, talking of the value of laughter, I told him how much I regretted that I had not inherited my mother's natural sense of fun, though at times I had found this same sense of fun very embarrassing when I was a girl, and he said:

'No real egoist, man or woman, has a strong sense of humour, yet it may be developed when a need of it exists, and it may be encouraged and trained to look

at situations ironically, especially when we ourselves are concerned.'

I told him that a dignitary of the Church had said to me 'that a sense of humour was a special gift from above.' 'Yes,' he exclaimed, 'and in the old mythology the gods themselves came to no good after they had kicked Momus (the comic spirit) out of Olympus.'

I used sometimes to try and talk to him about Buddhist teaching and Vedic philosophy, and reminded him that the Buddha had sat under a tree for years and years to think and gain wisdom in order to help the people, and that in the Vedas was to be found that oneness with Nature that he always advocated himself. But he would have none of it, nor could I induce him to read any recent books published on the subject.

It was his opinion that Oriental religious ideas taught the negation of life. He himself thought that we should accept life and all the experiences that come to us as part of our spiritual training. The body

should be dominated and disciplined, not starved and denied. His ideas on this question are accurately expressed in the following quotation :

'It is the extremest expression of the European as opposed to the Asiatic mind, the very antipodes of Eastern Asceticism. The body and its senses are necessary and good to be trained to do their work, not to be starved out of existence. If a man tries to escape from his body, still more if he tries to escape from his brain, and brains hold on fast and allow spirit to contradict mind, there is no way out for him.

'Earth will be accepted before she helps!'

Our lives should, in his own words, 'be steered a true course between the Ascetic rocks and the Sensual whirlpools.'

He suggested in his poems and in his conversation with intimate friends that it was a waste of effort that might be expended more profitably, to keep ask-

ing 'the questions that sow not nor spin.'

. . . . .

(Of) the whither, whose echo is whence.

I was gradually becoming extremely fond of Mr. Meredith's poems. I read them constantly, and came to understand them better. Greatly as I admire his novels, I have always preferred his poetry. During our talks he would speak lines out of them to illustrate his arguments, knowing that I was beginning to appreciate them, and partly to understand their meaning.

Speaking one day of the Japanese saying with reference to any conduct or words that are not worthy: 'It is not poetry,' he said eagerly. 'Yes, that 's just what I say in the "Empty Purse,"' and he quoted the lines :—

Is it accepted of song ?
Does it sound to the mind through the ear
Right, sober, pure, sane ? Has it disciplined feet ?
Thou wilt find it a test severe,
Unerring whatever the theme.

My note in my diary on this day was :

I think Mr. Meredith cares a great deal about his poems, as into them he has packed, condensed, and compressed all his philosophy of life.

As his health grew increasingly infirm, and prevented his going up as much as before to London, he was eager to hear all possible news about his friends and acquaintances, doing his best to stimulate my memory that I might tell him even trifling details about them and their families. I told him one day that I had just met Mr. E. G. and his new wife, and that it had been very pleasant to see how happy and contented they looked together, and Mr. Meredith said meditatively : ' Dear fellow ! and I always looked upon him as such a *determined spinster* ! '

Another day I was deploring with him the broken engagement between two young mutual acquaintances of ours, and he said : ' Ah ! it 's very easy to say, it 's the woman's doing. You press on her weak spot (which, observe, you know),

she flares up, and you say, " You had no idea she had such a temper." '

He sometimes gave me books and editions of his own works, but he did not like his friends to search after and purchase at exorbitant prices the early 1851 volume of his poems. He used to say ruefully how much he wished the British public had bought his books in his youth, when encouragement would have meant so much to him, instead of in his old age paying fancy prices for poems that he himself wished forgotten. One day he was quite angry with me when I told him that with the help of a book-loving friend I had acquired a copy of the coveted little green volume of the 1851 poems. He was so vexed, that the book which he had intended to give me that afternoon, and that was lying on the table beside him, was petulantly pushed out of my reach.

It was in the summer of 1897 that he came to stay with us at Elvaston Place for the last time. His health was rapidly becoming worse, and the steep stairs of

a tall London house were very trying to him. I remember how much I envied those among his friends who had a bedroom on the ground floor.

During this last visit he slipped on the stairs and hurt himself a good deal.

We ceased therefore to ask him to come and stay with us, but I went down whenever I could to spend some hours with him at the Cottage at Box Hill. His deafness was also increasing upon him, and he did not in consequence like seeing strangers or casual acquaintances.

Box Hill.

Dear Mrs. Jim,—To-morrow I am out in the day. On Thursday I receive Alphonse Daudet, Lison, with Henry James and others, who dine here. The Daudets, it seems, have made acquaintance with my books, and so give me some hours of their visit to England. Why did you delay? There is Monday open that may be too late. Inform me of your return if I am not to see you now.—Ever faithfully,

George Meredith.

Dear Mrs. Jim,—One petition. When you

are moved by the good thought, come unaccompanied. G. M.

Yet occasionally I would with some trepidation persuade him to let me bring a friend to visit him, and the experiment was almost always successful.

CHAPTER XI

In the autumn of 1897, my mother, Mrs. Brandreth, died after a very long and painful illness, and in the spring of 1898 I became engaged to marry Mr. J. G. Butcher, Q.C., M.P. for York. Mr. Meredith knew and 'liked him well,' and when I wrote to tell him that the date for our marriage was fixed, he wrote me an affectionate letter of good wishes and 'vows for my happiness.'

He used to compare Mr. Butcher to Harry Richmond, 'who never failed his father however trying his conduct might be!'

Mr. Meredith was a Radical in politics and a convinced Home Ruler. He had for some time past been amused at my growing Unionist sympathies, and liked to make fun about 'the opinions of your Tory Lord.'

After our marriage Mr. Butcher took a house in Yorkshire, Riccall Hall, to be near

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his constituents. My father, Mr. Brandreth, lived with us, and from time to time we used to send Mr. Meredith game.

One day in response to a gift of partridge Mr. Meredith wrote :

Oct. 8th, 1900.

My dear Mrs. Butcher,—Pleasanter than gift of the birds was the handwriting on the label, for it seems an assurance that your father is wearing into grandeur. Your husband's election is, I suppose, a certainty. Tory report speaks with fevered enthusiasm of his orations. He has not even to aim, they say, and the birds of the Liberal air come down in clouds. Impossible for me not to wish him well, for your sake, and they say you have canvassed with the lyric fervour of Corinna, under control of Aspasia's persuasive argumentation. Riette gives me a capital account of Dorothy and the sprightly son. May all things prosper them and you and every one dear to you.—Warmly your friend, George Meredith.

I take a great interest in Lady Ulrica Duncombe, and imagine her to be near you.

Mr. Meredith's daughter, Mrs. Sturgis, stayed with us at Riccall for the Doncaster races, and Mr. Meredith wrote to me :

Box Hill, *Sept.* 20*th*, 1901.

My dear Mrs. Butcher,—You will be back from Doncaster I think. I have no one to tell me of races now that Riette (his daughter) is at Overstrand. (Back to-day and I may hear.) But this is to speak in praise of the birds and the fair benefactress, what have I done to be so thoughtfully served! . . .

Princess—was here of late, and said very sweet confectionery things. . . . Your word of Lady Ulrica's appearance of better health refreshed me. . . .

Remember me to your lord and your father.—Warmly yours, George Meredith.

In another letter he wrote :

The birds were excellent, but I am jealous when I have to commend you for thinking of my larder.

Box Hill, Dorking.

My dear Mrs. Butcher,—The little books by post herewith may do for Dorothy, if she cares for these stories. They are reprints in good type. Perhaps the mother may think Chloe not suitable. . . .

Birds just brought in. Honour to the gun! but I would have you know that the books are not a mere attempt at repartee. Give my

regards to your father and that young chief of his country's λογικοί, and know me warmly yours, GEORGE MEREDITH.

If I wrote to him requesting his leave to bring some young author or authoress or politician down to make his acquaintance, he would sometimes excuse himself on the score of health, and sometimes reluctantly consent, but in that case he would always carefully settle the train by which we were to return to London for fear we might stay too long.

MY DEAR MRS. BUTCHER,—You will ruin your chance of the motor if you chuck pennies to the post in this reckless way. This day week I shall expect you . . . and you will do me the favour to lunch with me. This is understood. Tell your Tory Lord that I cite him as the model for professional sagacity to all my lawyer Liberal friends who are M.P.'s to no purpose for a round of years, and whose honorary M.P. to the name reads Missed Place. They vow that they chose their sides as patriots—to the contempt of the profession for their merits.—Very warmly, GEORGE MEREDITH.

In his talks as well as in his letters to me

'WAITING FOR MASTER'

he made frequent allusions to my husband's very decided political views.

Box Hill, *Dec. 31st*, 1901.

My dear Mrs. Butcher,—All happiness to you and yours for the New Year! together with that wholesome confusion to your husband's politics which will pluck him out of his *pleonistic* state, and throw him back upon his native strength once more.

(I sent him a present of some Madeira custard apples.)

The Madeira apples were custardy and curious. Perhaps Eve would have fallen for them. I am not so sure about Adam. The pips furnish an agreeable entertainment. A high propulsion would enable them to kill. But can there be any liveliness in such hard little niggers to perpetuate the race? Remember me very warmly to your father, and know me ever most cordially yours, George Meredith.

Box Hill, *Jan 12th.*

My dear Mrs. Butcher,—All good fortune to you for the year except on the Highbury motor (a reference to Mr. Joseph Chamberlain).

Your father's princely dispensing of woodcock would astonish sportsmen who never shoot one

without talking of it all the evening. . . . Though I can hardly write I am entreated day by day to 'send some words' to or for candidates, journals, and notices of meetings, not to speak of manuscript people panting for print.—Yours ever warmly, GEORGE MEREDITH.

Later in 1906 when my husband lost his seat at York by ten votes he wrote :

MY DEAR ALICE BUTCHER,—

. . . . . .

Your defeat at York was a shock even to my Radical bosom. Would I let in a friend if I could ? I do not answer.—Yours warmly,

GEORGE MEREDITH.

I used occasionally to take a book down with me that I thought he might like to read, and one afternoon having been greatly fascinated with the *Renaissance* of the Comte de Gobineau, also with the essay written on his work by M. Edmund Schuré, I took with me copies of these volumes and begged Mr. Meredith if he liked them to accept and place them in his library ; but he would not keep the books, and wrote to me :

I return the book of the Comte de Gobineau. I have not for long read anything so good. The Renaissance in its chief ruler and the ideas and character of the time is made to live. So much has the author impressed me that I sent for his *Histoire des Perses* and exposé of his political notions.

He was not at all an easy person to give presents to. He was very proud, and even the smallest gift had to be engineered with tact. I remember bringing him two silver flat poached egg-spoons from Norway, and he implored me to take then back with me to London, and looked much relieved when I consented to do so!

He liked little gifts of game, flowers, and inexpensive books—as long as they were 'not too much and not too often.' While appreciating any kindly thought, he was one of those who would always prefer to bestow rather than to accept benefits. This was one of the idiosyncrasies of his character which had to be accepted by those who wished to remain his friends.

I have heard people who did not know

him well say that he was ungrateful, but when they made this comment the thought that always came into my mind was that no one should expect an *eagle* to be grateful. He was an eagle of thought. He said once to a friend ' How I leaped through leagues of thought when I could walk ! ' but after his power of walking had departed, he still sat on his hillside and thought and thought till there came what he called ' the pounce of the mind,' when he would swoop down on the idea and bear it away to store in his brain for future use.

He was by no means always a benevolent eagle ! He said to my son Geoffrey Gordon, in reference to the criticisms that had been passed on his writings: ' They have always been abusing me. I have been observing them. It is the crueller process.'

Most of his life had been passed in observation and in thought and in solitude alone with Nature. Those who live all their days in crowds are apt to think with, instead of in advance of, the multitude.

CHAPTER XII

Mr. Meredith's fame as novelist and poet had been increasing, though I do not think he ever became a really popular author. To enjoy his works, to understand his thought, too much effort was required, while purists in style were indignant at his use of adjectives as nouns and at his involved sentences. Nevertheless his words found harbourage in many minds, and it was amusing to recognise fairly often phrases and sentences taken from his writings and published without any acknowledgment in articles, reviews, and even in other novels: and authors selected lines from his works with which to decorate the title-pages and headings of chapters in their own books.

One brazen young writer avowed, 'that Meredith was so jolly easy to steal from,

that he was a boon and a blessing to young authors.'

In 1905 he received the ' Order of Merit,' or the ' Order of Old Men ' as he whimsically called it to a friend.

After the publication of *Diana of the Crossways* and *The Egoist* he became famous among literary people, and his writings and opinions were talked about by the general public.

It grew to be the fashion to make a ' pilgrimage ' to see him, after which many of his visitors would publish picturesque little descriptions of their visit to ' The Sage of Box Hill ' in various literary papers and magazines.

Also not a few society damsels of wayward disposition sought his acquaintance and wrote to him afterwards signing themselves by their own names, with *Diana of the Crossways* written beneath. After receiving one of these letters he remarked: ' Diana was a head and shoulders, soul and stomach, taller than Miss X.'

Artists, authors, actors and notables,

both men and women, visited him during the last ten to twelve years of his life, and I am sure that in spite of his growls he thoroughly enjoyed the homage; but he liked it discreet and tempered with wit, or it quickly surfeited him.

Unfortunately he was often not well enough to receive his visitors, and it was a grief to all his friends to see his health failing and his deafness increasing; but his brain was as quick and clear as ever and remained so to the end.

Here is the place to record that he, his children, and all those who loved him owe a sincere debt of gratitude to Miss Bessie Nichols, his devoted nurse and attendant, whose hourly care of him for ten years spared him so much suffering, and helped to make his last days endurable and at times enjoyable.

I liked telling him comments that I had heard expressed about his writings, and rejoiced over the quotations that I discovered from his books in other people's novels. But after listening, with courteous

alertness, to my efforts to please and interest him, he would shake his head and say : ' My dear, it all comes too late,' and I know he often thought how his wife, ' the dear life of me,' would have rejoiced at his success ; but fortunately his children and his grandchildren were there to enjoy it beside him.

I think that more than all else he valued constancy in his friends. His old friends meant a great deal to him, and he would get quite elated at the prospect of any of his ' specials ' coming to see him, and would exert himself to the utmost to provide them with an acceptable entertainment.

His younger friends when they were engaged to be married would make a point of journeying down to Box Hill to present their ' fiancés ' to Mr. Meredith. These visitors were always welcome, and he would receive them in his most genial mood ; and I am sure none of them easily forgot the quaint phrases with which he would clothe his words of counsel and warning, nor would they forget the vivid

interest that he always showed in the prospects and projects for their future united lives.

After receiving one such couple, he said to me: 'Candour itself looked out of her eyes. People tell me she is plain! but he may count himself a fortunate man who is married to those sincere brown eyes!' But woe betide the visitors of either sex who hoped to impress him with 'pose and pretence.' To such callers he was somewhat remorseless, and by such he was not much liked.

He hated being exploited 'for his great name,' and used to provide great merriment for us by his descriptions of the perfervid Americans who journeyed down to Box Hill, so as to be able to say that they had made his acquaintance. One soulful dame, a great admirer (she said) of his books, cast her arms round his neck and in his own words 'imprinted an emotional salute upon my cheek,' an episode that caused him comic embarrassment.

Another wealthy American, being warned

that he did not like expensive presents, sent him what he described as cornucopias of fruit, chocolates, and other dainties anonymously; and yet another sent him somewhat similar offerings by her black negro servants. He afterwards described the negress and said: 'Her countenance was night; but through the night I saw a star!'

I confess that I mightily enjoyed making fun with him and at him about these 'pilgrimages to the Sage of Box Hill,' and he would laugh and say, 'The British public would not read my books, and now I am told that *curates—curates, my dear*—quote me from their pulpits!'

I said to him one afternoon: 'Now you have so many notables to see you, and great ladies to visit you, you won't want me to come so often and take up your time'; and he answered, 'You were my friend, dear, before the British public (who never cared to read my books) wanted to know what I eat for breakfast, and what coloured tie I generally wear.'

After I became the wife of a Member of Parliament, he often talked about politics and the political situation to me, and seemed interested to hear what was being said 'in the Tory camp.' But always through all his conversations he betrayed his constant nightmare anxiety as to what would happen to our beloved England if she were invaded by foreign foes. In his books he sometimes refers to this dread, but still more in his conversations he would repeat how wickedly mad he considered it of the politicians of both sides that they should make no better preparations for defence.

He used to say that when war did burst upon us—and we were unprepared—England would be like a hermit crab, without a shell, fighting with terrible odds against a fierce enemy crustacean protected by an armoured and scaly shell, and he dreaded the result.

Mr. Meredith had many friends and but few acquaintances.

I have little doubt that most of his

intimate friends could give similar records to mine of his understanding counsels in time of trouble, and tell of the wit and charm of his conversation. His talk had always the great merit of spontaneity, in which quality I think his novels are somewhat lacking.

He was given to keeping his friends in 'watertight compartments,' and seeing only one or two of them at a time. This may partly have been due to the smallness of his rooms, and to his increasing deafness, which made it impossible for him to hear conversation unless it was addressed directly to him.

When, in 1902, my father became the possessor of a motor car, one of our first thoughts was how pleasant it would be to take Mr. Meredith for drives. The road from London to Leith Hill became very familiar to our chauffeur, and many a pleasant drive through Surrey roads and lanes did we take with our old friend, and it was as much joy to my father as it was to me to contribute a little to his pleasure.

Mr. Meredith enjoyed these excursions like a boy, and the rapid pace of motoring (then somewhat of a novelty) amused and exhilarated him.

One day we met a very old friend of his and ours on the back side of Holmwood Common, who stopped our motor and scolded us well for driving about on a kitchen range, and making the country horrid for horses and their riders. Mr. Meredith did not appreciate this comment, and for the first time in my memory he made no retort.

From my Diary

Mr. Meredith said to-day, as we were motoring over to Leith Hill, that when he was in his donkey chair crawling along the lanes, his idea of motoring was 'Three toots of a horn, and a harem of veiled ladies dashes by leaving a stench of petrol behind, that lasts for a quarter of an hour.'

My father's motor enabled me very often to run down to Box Hill to see Mr. Meredith, and I sometimes had the pleasure of taking his special friends to

see him; but as time passed we would motor down to his cottage only to find that he was not well enough to drive out with us, or to undertake an excursion, and we would be Jesuitical in persuading him, that we were only driving past, and had not come down 'on purpose' to take him out.

Box Hill.

My dear Alice Butcher,—The second brace of birds has come to remind me of my silent reception of the first. I know I have not to plead, for you know that I am sensible, short only of pen in hand—of the first, and of much more, and so constantly that it serves for an argument supporting the claims of women in that respect. . . .

Such is my present hatred of the pen, that I make a resolute stand against the most urgent incitement of the head to dictate another cockshy for reviewers.—Ever warmly yours,

George Meredith.

Among Mr. Meredith's friends that I met from time to time at his cottage were Admiral Maxse and Sir William Hardman, the originals of Nevil Beauchamp and

Blackburn Tuckham in the novel *Beauchamp's Career*, Mr. Leslie Stephen, the original of Vernon Whitford in the *Egoist* (a very favourite character of the author's), and Sir Frederick Pollock, to whom Mr. Meredith dedicated *Diana of the Crossways*.

In mentioning the names of some of his friends, we must not forget his dogs. I can never remember Mr. Meredith without a dog companion. It was very amusing to watch him talking to his dogs. He would speak to them exactly as if they were human beings; only with more intonations of the voice, and with more gestures; and they seemed to understand everything he said, and on their part conversed with him in doggy fashion, with movements of ears, tail, and paws, with which they formulated their requests, and expressed their satisfaction. The very names bring back to memory the quaint companionship between them and their adored master and friend. Ben Kobold, Bruno, Islet, Jacobi, and, last but not least, the well-beloved Sandy, who was

present at his funeral, and died soon afterwards.

His epitaph on Islet the Dachs is worth quoting here :

Our Islet out of Heligoland, dismissed
From his quaint tenement, quits hates and loves.
There lived with us a wagging humourist
In that hound's arch dwarf-legged on boxing-gloves.

In the winter of 1903–4 Mr. Meredith went to spend some months with his daughter and son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. H. Sturgis, at Givons, near Leatherhead, where I saw him several times.

One afternoon, after he had returned to his own cottage, I went down to see him, but before I went into his room his nurse, Bessie Nichols, told me that I had better not stay long, as the day before some French authors and friends of his had been spending the day with him, and though he had greatly enjoyed their company, she feared he was very tired and exhausted, and she wanted him to have a resting afternoon and, if possible, get some sleep.

When I went into his room and received his cordial greeting, I made some excuse for leaving before tea, saying that I would call again the next day, but as he pressed me to remain, I explained that Bessie Nichols thought he had better have a rest, as the Frenchmen's conversation the day before had wearied him.

He made a gesture of annoyance, and said to me :

'You need not think, my dear, that *your* company fatigues my brains — *that* was conversation!'

CHAPTER XIII

In 1907 there came to me an experience which for a time prevented me from seeing Mr. Meredith, but which enabled me to understand and sympathise with the limitations to normal life that are caused by serious illness. My daughter Dorothy wrote to tell Mr. Meredith that the doctors had decreed that I must spend at least a year of life on my back, and that very possibly I might never be able to walk again. He wrote to me :

Box Hill,
Dorking, *May 12th*, 1907.

My dear Alice Butcher,—Dorothy's report of you this morning brings me to your bedside. I need not speak of my grief—you will know. And you know how vexatious it is to hear the preaching of patience. That virtue is withdrawn from us at the moment.

I have gone through the trial—on my back for a month, with one leg in a cathedral gallows. Then permission to lie on the right side, or the

left—luxury immense, until the thought of people up and moving caused the bed to seem an implacable rack.

However I won a smile through it, and chaffed Drs., Nurses and myself. The thing to do in such a case is to rise humorously above one's body, which is the veritable rebel, not the mind. That also is the task, whether we are up and about, or lying in bed. So you see you are still one with us, under the same trial. But this will seem only another way of preaching patience. Bessie Nichols trusts that you may have it. . . .'

I was distressed at the idea of Mr. Meredith missing his motor drives now that my father had a comfortable car, and during my long illness it was sent down from time to time for his use.

Box Hill, Dorking.

My dear Alice Butcher,—You have my constant sympathy, in thoughts at many moments during the day. For though my trial was milder, I found it hard to bear always on my back, denied any blessed turning to right or left, the procession of the worn-out same thoughts passing through me. Then the crippled leg was encased, and I could make a show of turning . . . to astonish the virtuous leg at the

strange transmogrification of its familiar fellow. That for the second month of durance. Your date of November afflicts me with a heavy weight—times flies; but it flies faster *out* of bed.

The grey old Senior once in it is a sleepy beast, unknowing of vanity. November must give you indemnification. As to the car you so kindly propose. Thursday would suit me in the afternoon between 2½ and 3. At Fleet on a visit to Will and his wife I tried one for a week, and we had many excursions, with a frisky chauffeur.

Heaven be with you, and that good thing of the terrible word for one imprisoned—Patience. GEORGE MEREDITH.

My father sent the car down to Box Hill, and with it to spend the afternoon in the country, our butler and his little son. Mr. Meredith wrote afterwards:

Box HILL, *July 20th*, 1907.

MY DEAR ALICE B.,—It may seem (but the conjecture will not bear analysis) luxurious to lie in bed and dispense motor cars to needy people. As to them, there is no doubt the drive, though we did not reach our destination under Leith Hill, took us into an undulating

land of firs and very green brackens; the car was perfect, as to our experiences of it; and we had confidence in your chauffeur. Lady Hardman had telegraphed that she was coming; my reply reached her flat too late. So I took her with me, and she is among those who are indebted to the dispensing bed for the pleasant run we had.

Compliment your butler on the good looks of his boy. I hear that sixteen years were required to produce him, but the result is worthy of the time expended. My sole regret for the day was that you were not present to grace the party.

Adieu in the full meaning of that valediction.

GEORGE MEREDITH.

During the long summer months that I was kept in bed, little boxes of flowers arrived from Box Hill, mauve sweet peas, violets and other country garden blossoms, to show that I was not forgotten. In the late autumn I was carried downstairs daily for a few hours, and Mr. Meredith wrote:

November 1907.

MY DEAR ALICE B.,—Your excursion downstairs must have given you some relief, as it does

to me in thinking of you. I have been unable to write—a heap of arrears in correspondence is in the basket beside me. A chill struck me down, and at one time Bessy Nichols took a serious view of the case. The most indomitable of attendants, she is very apprehensive. I preserved my cheerfulness, for either way it is a mere quiver of the balance to me now. When I ceased to walk briskly part of my life had ended, and I am bored by having to read belated opinions of the work I have done. Let me hear that you are making progress.

Be a Christian Scientist so far as to determine on it. My best remembrances to your father and J. G. B.—Yours constantly,

GEORGE MEREDITH.

My long illness was cheered with many alleviations. Friends came constantly to see me. A piano was installed in the room, and during August and September one or two friends came and played to me. An electrophone was attached to the telephone, and I used to lie and listen to Caruso and Destin singing at the opera, while on Sundays I could first attend to a choral service and then be switched on to hear some famous preacher.

I had one amusing experience. An eminent prelate wishing to hear a notorious preacher, and yet not wishing to be seen amongst his congregation, it was suggested to him by a mutual friend that he should come to my room on a certain Sunday morning and thus hear the sermon through the electrophone. This was done and he and I and the nurse listened for nearly an hour to the preacher's somewhat bombastic eloquence.

In December 1907 my father died at the age of 86. He had kept in vigorous health to within ten days of his death, and during the autumn had read a learned paper on 'Landscape in Sanskrit poetry,' and had also greatly enjoyed his shooting at Riccall with my husband. On hearing of our loss Mr. Meredith wrote :

Box Hill, *Dec.* 22, 1907.

My dear Alice B.,—There is no consolation for such a loss as yours, beyond the thought that the life ended had been a life well lived, and was full ripe. He was one of the good men to whom kindness was of his nature ; and I, who am so

near upon following him, can wish but that the closing of my eyes may be as peaceful both physically and in review of the days gone. I rely on your good sense to enable you to bear this blow. Give my love to the children.

You will not care for an 'oraison funèbre.' If it ever comes spontaneously from any one it would not from me.

The mind must be prepared for these heavy strokes of Nature. Besides, the life gone from sight and hearing is not, if it was loved, a life lost.—Yours most warmly,

GEORGE MEREDITH.

In April 1908 I went down, still invalided, to stay with my mother-in-law Mrs. Gordon at Lyme Regis, and while I was there received the following letter :

BOX HILL, *Ap. 19th*, 1908.

MY DEAR ALICE B.,—The plovers' eggs (from Riccall) have come, and are very acceptable, except that they remind me of better days for you. It is good that you are in country air, and under supervision of the marvellous Grannie. I cannot remember a time when she failed to show me a smiling face, and of how few can that be said ! The shower of letters since my oppressive 80th is abating ; still daily I have

one or two to answer. It is hard at my age to be pitch-forked up into public eye. Some would like it. I am not a Martin Tupper, who said, when he had been flung on the accustomed heap after much pitch-forking, that he would rather be an object of abuse than not be mentioned at all. And I have had to write a poem for the Union Jack Club Album while undergoing the torment of a heavy cold, all because of 'my great name,' which the album must have. I was too ill to see the Major, who called to urge the matter on Bessie Nichols, and so fascinated her that she lent her energies to cajole me. Also a sitting for Mr. Strang on behalf of the King for Members of the O.M. to be hung in the library at Windsor.

My worn-out features! Peace will come I still hope, and blither days for you.

GEORGE MEREDITH.

CHAPTER XV

During the summer of 1908 I saw Mr. Meredith several times. The crutches with which at that time I was obliged to walk distressed him so greatly that after the first visit I was obliged to hide them in the little passage outside his sitting-room door.

For some years past he had not been able to use the chalet rooms, as the path up through the orchard garden was far too steep for his failing powers, so he spent his days in the little room that had been his wife's drawing-room, and the dining-room was turned into his bedroom.

This drawing-room was hardly changed except that his wife's piano had disappeared, and been replaced by a small table used for meals. His surroundings might almost be called austere. He had few personal possessions ; he had never cared

to spend money on pictures or ornaments for his own use.

The portrait by Sandys of his wife hung above the mantelpiece. The tiny room contained little else but a few photographs of friends and some books; but there in his own chair by the fire still sat Mr. Meredith himself with the greeting smile we knew so well.

One afternoon about this time he spoke of Death, and repeated his favourite thought, 'that it was a friend without whom life would be impossible.' He quoted lines from his own poem 'The spirit of earth in Autumn,' and with an intonation never to be forgotten spoke of the life overhead in the pines and the silence below when

> We drop like the fruits of the tree,
> Even we,
> Even so.

I went to see him in November 1908. He seemed very weary and slept most of the time of my visit. He had always an arresting personality, but now his counten-

ance had grown more noble and (as his friend Mrs. Meynell said) august.

I sat beside him in the failing autumn light, and the fire flickered in the grate.

The silence was eloquent.

. . . . . .

When the hour came for departure, he barely roused himself to give me his farewell benediction.

It was the last time I ever saw him.

During the winter of 1908 and the early spring of 1909 I was too ill myself to leave home.

When Swinburne died early in 1909 I wrote to Mr. Meredith fearing that the loss of his old friend would be a shock to him.[1] The letter he sent me in reply must be almost the last he ever wrote :

Box Hill, *April 18th,* 1909.

My dear Alice Butcher,—I could have wished for a better account of your condition.

[1] He once told me that Swinburne was the original of Tracy Runningbrook in *Sandra Belloni.*

I had this hope, and the contrast of your crippled state with your natural animation is painful to me.

Swinburne's death revived our old walks and talks, and his fervours painfully. I can think of him now, with more calm. He had the ambition to do great work and has done it. . . .

As to the mud baths—I remember reading Michelet on them. He speaks favourably, I think he tried them for nerves—The Sun God was a famous physician. But Bessie Nichols says, 'How will any treatment affect the bone?' I wish I could answer.—Warmly yours,

GEORGE MEREDITH.

On 18th May 1909 he died, and his ashes were buried (where those who loved him best knew that he wished them to be) beside his wife in Dorking Valley Cemetery.

It has been said of him that it would be difficult to write his life, because it did not contain the incidents and adventures with which to make an impressive biography. This is true. His enduring legacy to posterity is contained in his novels and his poems.

What centuries of history and other literature he had pondered over, what leagues of thought he had traversed in the long eighty years of his life, of which the last ten years of helpless infirmity must have sorely tried his gallant powers of endurance. But his brain remained clear and vigorous to the end, and he had been spared the ordeal of intellectual decay, ever his secret dread.

Sir James Barrie in the beautiful appreciation that he published in an evening paper after the funeral on 22nd May 1909 (for which all Meredith lovers owe him thanks) says that before the chalet where he worked ' good and brave men will bow proudly, and good and brave women will bow more proudly still.'

The author of *Rhoda Fleming*, *Sandra Belloni*, and *Diana of the Crossways* had been the first to foresee the new world that was arising for women, and had proved himself a veritable St. George in combating on their behalf the dragons of ignorance and prejudice in the years that were past.

His place in the hearts and memories of his friends will never be filled, for whether we accept his philosophy of life or not, George Meredith himself was one who so closely ' neighboured the invisible ' that he could speak the words that discipline and brace the soul in time of need.

> Then let our trust be firm in good,
> Though we be of the fasting ;
> Our questions are a mortal brood,
> Our work is everlasting.
> We children of Beneficence
> Are in its being sharers ;
> And Whither vainer sounds than Whence,
> For word with such wayfarers.

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